



## AAC Publications

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### Fall on Rock — Rappel Error

Oregon, Smith Rock State Park, Brogan Spire

The Mountain Rescue Unit team lowers Jean Bury down the first pitch of The Cave Route (3 pitches, 5.7 R). During the descent from the summit of Brogan Spire, Bury suffered a severe pendulum fall on the first rappel. Photo: Deschutes County Search and Rescue

**On August 6, Jean Bury (58) and her husband, Scott, topped out on The Cave Route (3 pitches, 5.7 R) on Brogan Spire. Jean rappelled first from the summit. This diagonal rappel demanded that she walk her feet down an angling groove in order to get to the anchor on top of pitch two. As Jean was descending, she lost her footing. This caused her to pendulum far to the left.**

As she swung, the ropes grated over a rock that formed the lip on an overhang. Falling sideways, she landed in an adjacent gully and impacted the rock. She sustained major head injuries to the temple and ear and split her helmet in two. She also suffered a shattered patella, a broken rib, and two broken toes.

Above, Jean's husband called for help and was then able to rappel on her still-weighted rappel line and access her. A park employee and another climber in the area also responded to the location and provided first aid while 15 members of the Deschutes County Search and Rescue Mountain Rescue Unit (MRU) responded. Four MRU members climbed to her location. They further stabilized Jean's life-threatening injuries and packaged her in a litter. They then lowered her down the remainder of the route and crossed an irrigation canal to meet an awaiting ambulance.

### ANALYSIS

This rappel route is known to be awkward and to require route-finding skills to navigate safely. Toby Butterfield on Mountain Project wrote that the rappel from the summit can "be a bit dicey. ...and if you happen to get blown off or fall off while rap-walking backwards towards the P2 anchors, you're in for a big swing..."

There is a newer bolted rappel line to the climbers' left of the angling groove that was established to avoid this exact type of accident. Jean was unaware of this new rappel route, so the pair essentially rappelled the line of ascent, instead of the new descent that follows the fall line from the summit. When rappelling, identifying the next set of anchors from above is ideal but not always feasible. In this case, Jean was initially unable to locate the anchors and created a large pendulum potential by checking around both sides of the fall line. Losing her footing resulted in a swing. Jean was wearing a helmet and gloves, and had a friction hitch in place. These precautions and her husband's quick access and care likely saved her life. (Source: Caleb Bryce, Deschutes County Search and Rescue.)

## Images



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