



AAC Publications

Leader Fall — Did Not Place Sufficient Protection

California, Yosemite National Park, Yosemite Valley, Five Open Books

On May 17, at 3:30 p.m., a 32-year-old male fell roughly 30 feet while off route on the fourth pitch of Selaginella (5.8). The climber sustained an ankle injury with visible deformity but no obvious bleeding or loss of circulation, sensation, or motion. The injured climber was nonambulatory and unable to ascend or descend on his own. He called 911 to request a rescue.

A rescue team of 11 National Park Service (NPS) personnel was dispatched. The team hiked the Upper Falls Trail to the top of the route. Upon their arrival, a spotter on the valley floor used a telescope to help the team identify the optimal line for their rope rescue system.

Once the lower and raise system was constructed, one rescuer was lowered to the climber. The patient was assessed, treated, packaged in a litter, and raised out of the technical terrain. At the top of the cliff, the rescue team attached a wheel to the bottom of the litter to carry the patient down to the trailhead, where he was transferred to an ambulance.

ANALYSIS

Place gear often: This climber took a significant fall, and longer falls increase the likelihood of injury. Placing gear more often minimizes fall distance and reduces potential trauma.

Maintain a snug belay: Whenever belaying another climber, it is advised to watch them closely and minimize slack in the system.

Select appropriate climbs: Climbers should be well prepared to climb safely and confidently on their chosen objectives. Guidebooks grade the multipitch Selaginella at 5.8. If the grade of a given climb is challenging, consider climbing easier multipitch routes or practicing on numerous single pitches of the grade in order to prepare.

Study route topos: This accident could likely have been prevented by a thorough study of both the terrain and the topo. Whenever climbing, remain situationally aware and cross-reference the topo when in doubt. A printed copy or digital screenshot of the topo keeps this information easily accessible. (Source: Yosemite National Park Climbing Rangers.)

Images

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