



AAC Publications

Fall on Rock

New Mexico, Sandias, Muralla Grande

On August 6, Eben (42) and Stewart (32) hiked down the Chimney Canyon Trail at 8:49 a.m. to get to the base of The Second Coming (4 pitches, 5.8) on Muralla Grande. Eben had nine years of climbing experience and was training and mentoring Stewart in trad climbing. They'd climbed easy to moderate routes in the Sandias and both felt prepared for the route, having swapped leads of that grade during the year.

Eben started leading the first pitch at 9:30 a.m. Stewart led the second, finishing on a two-foot-wide ledge. They took a short break. Eben had climbed the route with a guide in 2016 and remembered the third pitch as being difficult and heady. The crux comes at a right-traversing ledge where the leader has to commit to a slightly overhanging hand crack in a left-facing dihedral.

Eben attempted the traverse at 11:30 a.m. It was hot and the dihedral was in the full sun. The hand crack proved challenging, with bad/insecure feet. Eben placed a marginal number 3 Dragon Cam at the crux and went left for a chalked two-finger pocket. After a few attempts his feet slipped and he fell 15 feet. All gear held, but Eben's left foot had caught a small ledge while he was falling and there was extreme pain in his left ankle. It was around 12:30 p.m. and the pair determined he likely had broken bones. Self-rescue was discussed but there were no rappel anchors in the area, so it would have meant committing to four or five rappels over difficult terrain. A rappel retreat would also have meant hiking out on the steep Chimney Canyon Trail.

With good cell coverage, they called 911. At some point a SAR drone flew above. The SAR team constructed a rope system at the top of the cliff, and 4.5 hours later, Albuquerque Mountain Rescue lowered in.

Ultimately, Stewart and one SAR member were lowered to the base while the injured Eben and a second SAR member were hauled out. They arrived at the top of the cliff at 7 p.m. At an Albuquerque hospital, Eben was diagnosed with a broken left fibula and talus.

ANALYSIS

Climbing in the Sandias is an adventure and the climbing grades are considered "stout." Some would consider the dihedral where Eben fell as 5.9, which was his trad leading limit. Tape or hand jammies would have provided a sense of security for his sweaty hands in the direct sun. It was fortunate they had a cell signal and enough daylight to summon SAR and be successfully rescued. (Source: Eben Travis.)

Images

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