



AAC Publications

Leader Fall — Loose Rock

Oregon, Smith Rock State Park, Picnic Lunch Wall

An injured climber being evacuated from the base of Picnic Lunch Wall at Smith Rock. After this climber suffering a debilitating leader fall, he and his partner fixed their rope and rappelled two pitches to the base, thereby facilitating a faster and safer rescue. Photo: Kassandra Spinnie

On June 13, Nolan (32) and I, Kassandra Spinnie (30), were climbing Voyage of the Cowdog (3 pitches, 5.9). It was well within our grade, as we had done numerous other multipitch routes at the same level and harder. We made it to the third pitch without difficulty. Nolan was about 60 feet up when a hold broke. He fell about 30 feet before the rope caught him. Due to his body position at the time of the hold breaking, Nolan fell sideways and slammed into the wall, his ankle and foot taking the brunt of the impact. I was able to lower him to the belay. We noted that he would be unable to walk out, and we decided SAR needed to be called.

Nolan activated his Garmin inReach, and we were able to communicate with dispatchers. I used a sweatshirt and some extra slings to create a splint. SAR determined it would be best if we could get to the base of the climb. Since we were two pitches up, the rope was not long enough for a typical rappel. I fixed the rope and rappelled the single rope, going first to ensure the rope would reach the base, and then Nolan rappelled. SAR was waiting to help him evacuate.

Nolan ended up with a displaced talar neck fracture in his foot that required emergent surgery. A kind party behind us was able to clean our gear and return it to us later that night.

ANALYSIS

Thinking back, we had all of our safeguards in place. Nolan had an inReach, which allowed for contact with SAR. An important thing is that rock climbing is dangerous, and no matter how well prepared or how confident you are, things can go wrong. It was good to have the necessary gear and skills to self-rescue. (Sources: Kassandra Spinnie and Nolan's Instagram account.)

Images



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