



AAC Publications

Leader Fall – Arm Tangled in Rope

Washington, Leavenworth, Rattlesnake Rock

Being mindful of one's rope position is always important. The photo shows a later re-creation of an accident on a granite sport climb near Leavenworth, Washington, in which the leader's rope wrapped around their arm immediately prior to a fall. Photo: Dylan Albrecht

My name is Emma, and on May 27, I was leading up Tubbing at Der Ritterhoff (5.11a sport) for a second time when I had an unusual accident. As I was approaching the roof section of the climb, I went up to make a clip. Then I remembered that I needed to position myself farther left, so I stepped back down. When I moved up again to climb through the roof, I fell about 15 or 20 feet. The fall itself was clean and safe, but I had not realized that while backing off earlier, a loop of rope had fallen over my right arm. In the fall, the loop cinched around my upper arm. The force of the fall transected the muscles in that area, causing a complete tear through the biceps muscle.

Two other climbers helped my partner set up a rope to lower me down the steepest portion of the approach trail. We drove to the ER in Leavenworth, and I had surgery two weeks later to repair the muscles.

ANALYSIS

I have always been warned about letting the rope run behind my legs, but I had not thought about how it could wrap around my arm. It was also a fairly warm day and my second time on the route; I had intended to top-rope it, but decided to try and lead it clean, though I was tired. This might have caused my inattention to the position of the rope around my arm. The sun angle also prevented my belayer from seeing the loop of rope and alerting me about it.

Rope awareness is the responsibility of the person climbing, but I am still thinking about how this might have been mitigated. (Sources: Emma Chabal and Dylan Albrecht.)

Images



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