



AAC Publications

Rockfall

Wyoming, Grand Teton National Park, Upper Blacktail Butte

On the afternoon of May 30, Jenna Jones (18) was gearing up at the base of a sport crag when she was struck in the head by a falling rock. Jenna sent the following report to ANAC:

While on a Teton trip with my boyfriend, "A," we decided to do a quick climb at Upper Blacktail Butte. Neither of us had been there before, and we decided on a 5.9 route after some internet research. After hiking to the base, "A" went to the top of the cliff to set up a top-rope. I had a wonderful view of the Tetons as I was putting my harness on; my helmet wasn't even out of the bag yet. That is all I remember, because at that point I was struck in the head by a boulder that had fallen from the top of the 60-foot cliff. "A" had a misstep while setting up the top-rope and dislodged the rock.

I regained consciousness about five minutes later. "A" was making a tourniquet out of his T-shirt. I felt no pain due to adrenaline and shock. I went unconscious again and woke up six hours later in the Idaho Falls ER. A doctor was giving me lidocaine shots prior to receiving stitches and staples. Pain set in quickly when my consciousness returned. I was told I needed brain surgery. I was also unable to have food or water until 2 a.m., when it was decided that I no longer needed the surgery. After two nights in the ICU, I was cleared to go home. A long road of recovery lay ahead of me.

ANALYSIS

I believe everyone at the base should be cautious of loose rock falling from the top. Those who are above should take extreme caution to not dislodge rocks from the top of the cliff. I would have had my helmet on within three minutes had the rock not fallen, since I was getting all my gear on. I think it is safe to say helmets should be put on first when reaching the climb site. (Source: Jenna Jones.)

***Editor's Note:** There have been at least four incidents in the last few years of climbers being struck by falling rock while at the base of a climb. Most of these accidents ended in fatalities, and as terrible as Jenna's accident was, she can count herself as fortunate.

Images

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