



AAC Publications

Leader Fall on Rock

Wyoming, Devils Tower, Durrance Area

A climber injured his leg on the first pitch of the Durrance Route (just right of the sun/shade line in the middle of this photo). Though his partner offered to bail, the climber considered the time they had invested in the trip and decided to continue to the top. Photo: w_lemay — Wikimedia

We drove up to Devils Tower and on August 31, with nobody behind us, we took our time racking up for the Durrance Route (6 pitches, 5.7+). Person 2 (male, 41) led the approach pitch. Person 1 (male, 23) then started up the first real pitch (the Leaning Column), climbing steadily. As he started toward the top of the column about 70 feet up, his foot popped off and he fell. Person 1 impacted the ledge below with both feet.

Person 1 had Wilderness First Responder experience, and after waiting several minutes he did a self-evaluation. His feet were bruised but had full movement and did not feel broken. The bolts for the top of the pitch were quite close, so he continued. When he arrived at the belay, everything still appeared normal, so he continued, linking that first pitch with the next.

Person 1 climbed the next three pitches, but slowly realized his knee could not be weighted. By the time he led to the top, Person 1 was unable to weight the knee on flat ground. The two climbers rappelled, and Person 1 limped and butt-scooted down the trail. Person 1 believes that he smashed his knee into the wall while falling; this dislocated his kneecap, which caused an osteochondral fracture of the femur.

ANALYSIS

Person 1 could have placed more protection. Person 2 also may have been overconfident in his partner's ability and gave an unnecessarily loose belay. Being close to the ledge, Person 1 likely would have decked regardless, but some of the force might have been absorbed had he had a tighter belay.

Person 1 also did not recognize that a serious injury might have occurred and decided to continue climbing. Fortunately, the injury was a deep bone bruise that healed without pins or a cast. The desire to summit might have played a role in this accident, as the team had driven seven hours to climb the route. (Source: Person 1.)

Images



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