



AAC Publications

Fractured Ribs — Belayer Pulled into Stick Clip

Arizona, Cochise Stronghold, West Stronghold, Sheepshead Area, Mallethead

"Old Bendy" was at the center of an accident in which a belayer was pulled by a falling leader into the end of his stick clip, breaking five ribs. Photo: Mark Hammond

On February 22, Mark Hammond was belaying a partner on Hammered and Enamored (5.11b) on the Mallethead formation in West Cochise Stronghold. The belay station was on an exposed ledge 30 to 40 feet off the ground, where he was anchored to a single bolt. Hammond described the event to ANAC:

My buddy was leading, and I was worried that I was going to drop my pack off the ledge, so I took it off and clipped it to the single bolt. The stick was stuck inside the pack with the opening cinched down tight. A short time later, my buddy fell. I was twisted and pulled into the stick. The clipping end center-punched me in the ribs. I broke five of them, strangely enough from the back. It's possible that it shifted to that position when I was pulled by the fall since my rope was also clipped to that bolt.

ANALYSIS

Improbable as it seems, this accident illustrates an unforeseen hazard. Hammond is an AMGA-certified guide, and clipping the pack in was the smart thing to do. Unfortunately, he unknowingly positioned a rigid, blunt object at torso height directly in the line of pull during a leader fall.

This accident is worth considering for anyone who carries a stick clip. Leaders often clip one to their harness or leave it on a lower bolt while working sequences above. A fall with or onto the stick could cause serious injury. Using webbing or cord to create a flexible connection point, rather than clipping directly to the stick's eye, might prevent it from aligning with a falling body.

Not all hazards can be foreseen. This one now can. (Source: Mark Hammond.)

Images



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