



AAC Publications

Fall on Talus — Concussion

California, High Sierra, Hoover Wilderness, North Peak

On September 7, my partner and I, both mid-30s, were climbing North Peak (12,242 feet) in the Hoover Wilderness outside Yosemite. We had completed the low-fifth-class Northeast Ridge and were scrambling up to the summit when I stepped on a piece of talus that suddenly flipped over and trapped my foot. I lost my balance and fell, landing on my head (I still had my helmet on). I remember feeling my neck making a crunching sound as I landed.

According to my partner, they had heard me yell, and when they turned around, all they saw were my feet straight up in the air as I tumbled backward. Fortunately, I didn't fall far, and ended up on my back on flatter ground. I didn't lose consciousness, so I was able to quickly examine myself: motion in the toes, bruises and scrapes, but no visible head or spinal trauma.

We rested for a bit before continuing up to the summit. On the descent, I started to feel nauseous and fatigued, and developed a headache even though we were losing elevation. My partner drove me to the Mammoth Hospital in Mammoth Lakes, where the ER doctor diagnosed me with a moderate concussion and whiplash.

ANALYSIS

That day I decided to wear an unvented N95 mask. Odd choice, but the air quality was poor from the nearby Garnet Fire. We had just arrived from sea level the day prior for a two-week climbing trip and were eager for some "warm-up" climbs, smoke be damned. I wore the mask on the approach, took it off for the technical climbing, and put it back on for the summit scramble. Between the acclimation and the extra effort to breathe, I remember feeling lightheaded and sluggish enough that I was too lazy to take off my helmet, which ultimately prevented a more serious head injury.

Finally, there's complacency. Having climbed North Peak twice in prior years, I didn't think much of the scramble section—it was just a "hike up" after the "fun climbing." I now plan to wear the helmet for any scramble ascent, or descent. (Source: Anonymous.)

Images

Article Details

Author	Anonymous Author
Publication	ANAM
Volume	14
Issue	1
Page	39
Copyright Date	2026
Article Type	Accident reports