



AAC Publications

Ground Fall – Multiple Pieces of Protection Pulled

California, Joshua Tree National Park, Real Hidden Valley, Sports Challenge Rock

On November 15, Adam and Sarah (not their real names) were visiting Joshua Tree for the first time and decided to climb Leave It to Beaver (5.12a), a classic overhanging trad route about 70 feet in length. Adam opted to lead the climb onsight. He made it up the unprotected boulder-problem start, and then placed two BD No. 0.3 cams in the crack before the crux. Sarah reported that when Adam was finishing the crux section, he was approximately six feet above his top piece—at which point he fell. Both cam placements failed, and Adam fell about 40 feet to the base of the route. A nearby park ranger heard the fall and provided medical aid until additional resources could respond. A helicopter was able to hoist Adam from the scene and transport him to the hospital. He survived with significant injuries.

ANALYSIS

When visiting a new climbing area, it's a good idea to either spend time learning the rock by sticking to routes below your onsight limit or rig a top-rope on any limit climbs. Joshua Tree is known for its tricky climbing and inobvious gear, and Leave It to Beaver is more often top-roped than led. Even John Bachar, the strong and bold climber who first led the route, had top-roped it extensively beforehand. The route has regular opportunities for solid protection, but they may not be obvious. There is an important nut placement just before the crux that is commonly used when leading this route that Adam apparently did not see.

Had a ranger not been nearby, it is unknown how Sarah would have called for help, as cell service in the park is generally unavailable. It is important to know how to contact emergency services before an accident occurs. Carrying an SOS device or knowing the location of the Joshua Tree emergency satellite phone (at Intersection Rock) can make the difference between getting prompt lifesaving medical care and not. Adam suffered severe injuries from the fall, but fortunately was wearing a helmet. It cracked from the impact and absorbed some of the energy directed at his head. (Source: NPS.)

Images

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