



AAC Publications

Fall on Approach — Head Laceration, Broken Back

Colorado, Boulder Canyon, The Bihedral, Upper Tier

Moderate ground, like this class 3 section on the approach to the Bihedral's Upper Tier in Boulder Canyon, can cause serious accidents. In October 2025, a climber stumbed, fell, and broke his back. Photo: Anonymous

On October 11, our party of three was approaching the Upper Tier of the Bihedral crag in Boulder Canyon. We reached a trail junction where the steep, loose hiking becomes a class 3 scramble. As we started across, one member of our party lost his footing and tumbled 20 feet down a steep scree slope. He was carrying the rope in his pack and had a coffee mug in one hand. This left him unable to catch himself.

When we reached him, he was in significant back pain and had a three-inch-long head laceration and scrapes on his legs. We pressed the SOS button on one of our inReach devices and sent a climber to drive down-canyon to get cell service and call 911. Another one of us had Wilderness First Aid training and cared for the fallen climber for an hour until rescue arrived. The local fire department and Rocky Mountain Rescue performed a litter extraction and lowered him 200 vertical feet to the road. An ambulance took him to the hospital, where they discovered he had fractured his back.

ANALYSIS

Three things made this worse than it needed to be: None of us were wearing helmets on the approach—had we been, the head laceration would have been far less severe. The fallen climber was wearing casual sneakers versus approach shoes with sticky rubber, which gave him much less purchase on the loose scree. And he had a coffee mug in one hand.

Approaches to crags like the Bihedral's Upper Tier can be objectively harder and more consequential than the climbing itself. This can catch people off guard, as the hazard presents itself before the rope comes out and before the mind shifts into climbing mode. We were experienced climbers at an unfamiliar crag, and none of us had researched the approach. Besides helmets and sticky rubber, keeping both hands free on scrambly terrain is a habit that costs nothing and might prevent an accident. (Source: Anonymous.)

Images



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