



AAC Publications

Rockfall

New Mexico, Diablo Canyon, Cockscomb Crag

On March 29, Climber 1 (46, male) was finishing a long day of climbing. He wanted to onsight Spring Chicken (5.12a) as the last climb of the day. Climber 1 encountered a chossy section halfway up. Though he took precautions by tapping on blocks to check for loose rocks, he began to climb and dislodged a 25-pound rock with his left hand. He yelled "Rock!" and took a whipper on a bolt.

As the rock fell to the ground, his belayer dodged the rock and caught the fall. The rock hit the ground and broke into pieces, and a chunk struck the belayer in the feet, causing a broken toe on one foot and a broken foot on the other. Climber 1 lowered to the ground, and they contacted 911 at 3:15 p.m. Santa Fe County Fire Department showed up two hours after the initial phone call. Climber 2 was loaded onto an ambulance by 8 p.m. and transported to the hospital.

ANALYSIS

Spring Chicken climbs through the intersection of two separate lava flows. This geologic process caused the area to have loose rock compared to the surrounding crags. Also, the rock in this area is affected by a freeze-thaw cycle that causes rocks to be loosened. Climber 1 said that if he would have done anything differently, it would have been to have a proper discussion about the belay stance and potential rockfall. Had the belayer been closer to the wall, it might have prevented the injuries. Both climbers were wearing helmets and attribute them to preventing further injury. (Source: Anonymous.)

Images

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