



## AAC Publications

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### **Fall on Rock – Poor Position, No Helmet**

Colorado, Summit County, White Cliff

**On June 7 a woman (29) suffered a serious head injury while leading a 5.9 sport route. After clipping the first quickdraw (previously placed by her belayer, age 26), the climber slipped before clipping the second draw, causing her to fall.** The belayer did not remember seeing the rope behind the climber's leg, but once tension came on the rope the climber flipped upside down, violently hit her head against the wall, and lost consciousness. The belayer lowered her to the ground and called 911. She was unresponsive for approximately three minutes.

Two Summit County Rescue Group members (both EMTs), along with a Wildland Fire Unit (an EMT and a paramedic), were in the vicinity and responded to the call, reaching the party and beginning treatment within 20 minutes of the accident. Within another 10 to 15 minutes, an additional paramedic and other rescuers with medical and extrication resources joined the first responders. The patient had an open skull fracture. She was loaded into a litter and evacuated along the steep, loose trail, requiring three separate belays. She was then transported to Summit Medical Center by ambulance and ultimately was flown to Denver by a Flight for Life helicopter.

#### **Analysis**

The primary cause of the accident was the climber allowing the rope to get behind her leg, which easily can flip a climber upside down in a leader fall. It is important to keep the lead rope in front of your feet and legs whenever possible. While the climber had three years of climbing experience, she was only a moderately experienced lead climber (fewer than 25 total leads).

The severity of the head injury likely would have been reduced if the climber had been wearing a helmet. Both the climber and the more experienced belayer did not regularly wear helmets while climbing, and the belayer stated that he understood them only to be useful in protecting against rockfall. While helmets are primarily designed to protect against falling objects, they also can help prevent head injuries during leader falls, including skull fractures and lacerations. (Source: Summit County Rescue Group.)

## Images

## Article Details

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