



## AAC Publications

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### **Fall on Rock – Dislodged Block, Inadequate Protection**

Utah, Wasatch Range, Pfeifferhorn, North Ridge

**On November 6, my partner (male, 25) and I, John Sigmon (32), set out to attempt the north ridge of Pfeifferhorn before a storm came in and potentially snowed out the route.** It was both of our first times on this climb, and we were aware of reports of loose rock in the summer and fall, especially in the upper sections of the route. A short while after gaining the ridge, we decided to rope up and simul-climb due to loose rock and a few exposed sections. I was leading about two-thirds of the way up the 800-foot ridge, with one cam between me and my partner. After walking across a horizontal area full of small ledges and loose rock, there were two low-angle corners in front of me. The left one looked easier, if a little loose, with an obvious opportunity for protection at the bottom. The right one looked harder but a little more fun, with obvious protection about 15 feet up.

I started up the right corner and spotted a nice stance on a three-foot-wide ledge above me, where I expected to place a piece. The ledge looked solid. I pulled up with both hands to mantel, with my feet smearing, when suddenly the top foot or so of the ledge broke off. I fell and hit the ledge below, thinking I would stop, but then kept rolling. I yelled out “falling!” and bounced again, then came to a stop on another ledge. The rope never came tight due to the distance to my last piece.

I immediately sat up and moved all my hands and feet, visually checking my extremities for unusual angles. I noticed pain in my right elbow, right hip, and left ankle. My fingertips tingled for several minutes. I yelled for my partner to come up and help, and he assisted in removing my shoe and checking my ankle, which hurt and was swollen but had good range of motion. Nothing seemed broken and I didn’t seem to have any head, neck, or spine injuries. With only a few hundred feet to the summit, and most of the fifth class behind us, we decided the fastest way out was up.

My partner led the remaining sections until we hit easy terrain and unroped. We descended the third-class terrain from the summit and then headed out via the hiking trail for approximately a 5.5-mile trip back to the car.

### **ANALYSIS**

Knowing the route was 5.4 and full of loose rock, I should have followed the easiest line and been diligent about placing more protection. The rock that came off looked so well-attached that I didn’t even bother to tap on it. In the future, I will test critical holds more carefully. I consider myself lucky. I ended up with two weeks of rest for a minor ankle sprain and some contusions, and was climbing again a few weeks later, although with a little less courage than before. (Source: John Sigmon.)

**Editor’s Note:** These climbers used a 30-meter rope, a good tactic for simul-climbing. A short (or shortened) rope improves communication and reduces rope drag, allowing more protection to be placed; long slings also ease rope drag while simul-climbing.

## Images



Accident site on the north ridge of Pfeifferhorn. The climbers self-rescued over the top and down the trail to their car.



Scene of the accident on the Pfeifferhorn. The climber fell from the corner on the left side of the photo and landed on the rock-strewn ledge toward the middle of the image.

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