



## Two Climbers Fall While Simul-climbing

Utah, House Range, Notch Peak

**On November 2, three climbers were linking the lower north face with the upper north face of remote Notch Peak. They completed the lower face via Western Hardman (12 pitches, 5.10c). They then started up the upper face on Book of Saturday (12 pitches, 5.11a R).**

Climber A was leading and linking pitches on two 8.5mm, 60m half-ropes. He was clipping alternately. He passed the bolt anchor at the end of pitch three, and as he neared the anchor for pitch four, Climber B—who was clipped to pitch two’s belay anchor—shortened his tie-in by 15 feet. Climber C, the belayer, took A off belay on that strand of rope, and B began simul-climbing. Meanwhile, Climber C continued belaying A with the remaining length of the other strand.

Shortly after beginning pitch three, Climber B lost his balance and lunged for a hold. The hold broke and he fell, dragging A down with him.

Climber A was six feet above a bolt—his last piece of protection—when he was pulled off. There was no progress-capture device on the last piece. [Editor’s Note: When the rope runs through a progress-capture device that is clipped to protection, a simul-climbing lead climber is prevented from getting pulled downward if the follower falls.] Climber A flipped upside down during a 30- to 40-foot fall. At the same time, B fell 30 feet, plunging past the pitch two belay and in the process spraining his ankle. He ended up hanging in free space. Climber A struck his heels, back, and head during the fall but remained conscious. He was lowered to the (intermediate) pitch three anchor. Climber B managed to pull in and clip directly into a bolt from the previous pitch and was belayed on a Munter hitch to the belay anchor by C. The group self-rescued by rappelling the route and reversing the long approach back to the car.

### ANALYSIS

Simul-climbing can make the difference in completing a long route, as it often allows the team to move faster and forgo time-consuming belay transitions. The disadvantages include an increased fall risk for all involved—this accident is a prime example. While this team was very experienced, several factors came into play. Lunging for a loose hold initiated the falls, and the absence of a progress-capture device on the last bolt guaranteed a long plunge for Climber A. The team’s choice to use 8.5mm ropes was a measure of their goal of efficiency. In this case it elevated the risk, as the rope that caught the two falling climbers snagged on the rock, tearing the sheath open and revealing the rope’s core.

Though Mountain Project says this route has “the commitment of a long wall or alpine route and the seriousness of hard, sand-in-your-eye desert routes or adventure routes in the Black Canyon,” that doesn’t mean unnecessary risks are required. Climber A says that linking pitches “wasn’t necessary—there was time to stop and pitch it out.” He also adds, “It was one of those worst things that could happen in a worst-place scenario.” (Sources: Climber A and Mountain Project.)

## Images



The impressive north face of Notch Peak in western Utah, with the 1,500-foot upper tier in the background. Book of Saturday, where this incident occurred, climbs the left side of the face. The climber is atop the lower tier; the Western Hardman route finishes behind him.

## Article Details

Author	Climber A and Mountain Project
Publication	ANAM
Volume	12
Issue	75
Page	81
Copyright Date	2022
Article Type	Accident reports