



AAC Publications

Fall on Rock – Inadequate Protection

Utah, Indian Creek, Cliffs of Insanity

On the afternoon of October 3, I (Ryan McAvoy, age 24) fell about 50 feet from a route called Vinciny (5.10). The route is 60 feet tall.

It was our second day in the Creek, and I was climbing with a mix of old and new friends. I agreed to lead Vinciny. It starts out fingers, turns to hands, then gains a ledge before a final flake to the anchors. My phone was dead and I'm not sure if we had a guidebook, but I talked with a new friend, Peggy, who had climbed the route before. I brought the gear I thought I would need.

I am relatively new to leading trad climbs. However, in the months leading up to climbing Vinciny, I had been leading multi-pitch routes in Big and Little Cottonwood canyons. I had just returned from a trip to Yosemite. I was feeling good about my abilities.

The first 45 feet was a little spicy and fun. I had placed a couple of finger-size cams in the first part. I then placed a number 2 and then a bomber number 3 Camalot before climbing onto a ledge. There was a flake to my left and a small crack to the right that went straight to the anchors, 15 feet above. I wanted to place something in the flake, but I hadn't brought any .75s. Peggy asked if I wanted to pull up some cams of that size, but I declined and ended up placing a purple Metolius TCU in the small crack. I laybacked up the flake, smearing my feet on a shallow left facing corner. It wasn't very secure, but I made good progress, running it out because I didn't have gear that would fit and placing would have been difficult.

I got to the bolt anchor but couldn't quite reach it due to awkward feet. I unclipped my personal anchor system so it would be easier to clip the anchor. I decided to reach the chains, grab them, and then clip myself in. As I was reaching for the chains, I fell.

On the way down, my right ankle hit the ledge. I flipped upside down for the rest of the fall. The purple TCU pulled, and luckily the bomber number 3 caught me. I was not far from the ground when I came to a stop. Peggy lowered me, and two others immediately came to see if I was alright. I believe the first thing I said was, "I think I'm okay." However, I realized my right ankle was not okay.

After immobilizing my ankle using Chaco sandals, jackets, and tape, I took some ibuprofen. We rigged up a few different ways to carry me, using harnesses, slings, and carabiners. A large group of people had assembled to help, and it took us about 1.5 to 2 hours to get back to the cars.

Editor's Note: Ryan was driven to the emergency room in Moab, where he was diagnosed with a dislocated ankle, fractured fibula, and fractured posterior malleolus. He has since recovered nearly fully.

ANALYSIS

I made several mistakes. The biggest and most impactful was I let myself become overconfident, even cocky. I felt good on the climbs I had done the day before and thought Vinciny would be within my abilities. This overconfidence played into complacency when I didn't seek out a guidebook or Mountain Project for better gear beta. The next huge mistake was choosing not to haul up a 0.75 cam when I had the option. For some reason, I got it into my head that pulling up gear would mess

with the “purity” of the onsight.

To add to the sketchiness of my situation, I was run-out on a purple TCU (the second-smallest in the range), not ideal for catching a big fall, and also not ideal for sandstone. Even if I had decent protection in the flake, there was still potential to deck on the ledge.

[Editor’s Note: While skipping a clip on an overhanging sport climb can be exhilarating, punching to the chains, sans gear on soft sandstone, can lead to injury, as Ryan can now attest.]

Almost everyone on scene, including myself, had at least a WFR certification. This made evacuating me super smooth. I’m extremely grateful to my many first responders for making a bad situation as good as could be. For everything that went wrong that day, a lot of things went right. I’m lucky to be alive. (Source: Ryan McAvoy.)

Images



Climbers improvised a splint for the patient's injured ankle and a carrying system to extract him from the rugged terrain.

Article Details

Author	Ryan McAvoy
Publication	ANAM
Volume	12
Issue	75
Page	85
Copyright Date	2022
Article Type	Accident reports