



AAC Publications

Lead Fall on Rock — Cam Pulled Out

Oregon, Smith Rock State Park, Morning Glory Wall

The crux section of Lion's Chair Start (5.10c/d R) at Smith Rock. The higher red circle marks the bolt that Genereux was attempting to clip, prior to falling to the ground. The smaller red circle marks the location of the number 0.4 cam that pulled out when he fell. Photo: Garrett Genereux

At the end of a great day of climbing on May 15, my partner Lance (30) and I, Garrett Genereux (34), decided to do one last route on our way out of the main area. We stopped at Lion's Chair Start (5.10c/d R). As usual, no one was on it despite the routes on both sides being busy. I had been on the route several times before.

I didn't realize how tired I was until on the route. I was trying to conserve energy by not placing too much pro. I was about one body length above my first two pieces of gear and placed a number 0.4 cam. My belayer asked if it was a good placement. I assured him that it was fine and kept moving. As I approached the first bolt, where the crack pinches down, I became very fatigued and started getting scared. I wanted to clip the bolt as fast as I could. I was able to hang the draw at my farthest reach. Then I pulled up rope to make the clip. As I inched the rope closer to the lower carabiner, my left foot greased off and I fell.

There was a ton of rope in the system, and when I heard the 0.4 plink out of the crack, I knew I was going to the ground. My left foot briefly hit, and then I landed on my butt. I lost my breath and made some guttural noises trying to get it back. I lay supine. My ankle hurt, and my lower back was pretty tight, but I had full sensation and movement below. I even remember feeling like I needed to pee while lying there and took that as a good sign.

The folks nearby were able to clean up the lower pieces, and someone with the longest stick clip I've ever seen snagged the draw off the bolt. Someone let me borrow their camp chair. I was able to slip off my climbing shoes. My left ankle was dark in color and already beginning to swell, but I could bear weight and felt that we didn't need a crew to carry me out.

My partner carried the gear and I used my stick clip as a walking stick as we hiked to the road. I was dropped off at the emergency room in Redmond. My ankle was just a soft-tissue injury, and my back had compression fractures at T12, L1, and L2. I was soon discharged. Subsequent follow-up determined all was good. Two months later, I was back climbing and feeling well. Since then I have even gotten back on the same route. I sewed it with 11 pieces rather than three.

Analysis

Simply put, I did not place enough protection. In the first 15 feet, I only placed three pieces: a nut and a cam protecting the start and then the 0.4 cam that pulled. Also, I could have climbed a bit higher to a better hold and clipped the bolt with the same amount of rope in the system as I had when I fell. I also should have checked in with myself mentally and physically. While it is not the most difficult route, it does take focus and it gets an R rating in the newest guide. (Source: Garrett Genereux.)

Images



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Article Details

Author	Garrett Genereux
Publication	ANAM
Volume	13
Issue	77
Page	
Copyright Date	2024
Article Type	Accident reports