

## **FALLING ROCK—DISLODGED BY CLIMBING PARTNER, POOR POSITION**

### **California, Sierra Nevada, Dunderberg Peak**

During the course of the weekend of 27–29 April, I (Peter Francev, 29) met two friends (Jason Hundley, 30, and P.J. Gordon, 29) near Bridgeport, California for an early spring ascent of Dunderberg Peak. Our plan was to climb Dunderberg in preparation for a climb of Mount Shasta's West Face Gully during the following May or June.

Winter conditions in California were warm and dry, so that by the end of April most of the snow on the peaks was melted out, and Dunderberg was no exception. Our plan was to leave the Virginia Lakes trail approximately one mile from the trailhead and climb cross-country over two small benches, so that we could establish a basecamp at Moat Lake. Fortunately, there was a good ground cover of snow atop of the second, higher bench, which also surrounded Moat Lake. Unfortunately, the snow had melted out on the west face of Dunderberg, which, coincidentally, was going to be our route to the summit.

We established basecamp and practiced self-arrest skills on the nearby snow-covered slopes. On the morning of April 29, we awoke at 6:00 a.m. We languished in camp, trying to warm up in the sub-freezing chill and gather the motivation for our climb. At 7:30 a.m., we left camp heading east up the West Face. We were prepared for severe weather carrying extra clothes, and we carried our ice axes and crampons, although neither was needed.

Somewhere near the 11,500-foot mark of Dunderberg's 12,374-foot summit, we came across a narrow chute. After consulting one another, we decided unanimously that Jason would take the lead, I would follow, and P.J. would sweep below. Approximately twenty minutes into the climb up the chute, Jason accidentally dislodged a "basketball-sized" rock that came down, ever so picking up speed. I yelled, "ROCK!" to alert both Jason and P.J. As I watched the rock coming directly at me, I contemplated either moving or turning my back, crouching, and using my backpack to shield myself from the rock. I decided since the rock's fall line was remaining straight that I would quickly move to my left out of its line of descent. I figured that with P.J. being a good 75 to 100 feet below me that he too would be able to get out of harm's way.

I made it about ten feet to the left of the falling rock where at the last second it broke into two almost equal halves. The right half skirted away from my position, but the left half hit me squarely on the inside of the knee. The impact spun me around and I instinctively yelled, which scared both Jason and P.J. At first, I was unsure if I had broken any of the bones in my knee, so I waited a few seconds before I tried to put any pressure on it, let alone try to move it. Before I knew it, both Jason and P.J. were at my side tending to my "needs."

After a few minutes, I was able to put some pressure on the knee. We decided that we should abandon our attempt at Dunderberg and get back to camp as quickly as possible in the event of knee damage. Over the course of the descent, I was able to put some pressure on it, which told me that I was very fortunate to come away with a slight sprain. We made it back to the trailhead and parted our separate ways. The seven-hour drive back to the Los Angeles area, unfortunately, caused the knee to stiffen in place and I was unable to walk without a limp or significant pain for two weeks. I have made a full recovery.

### **Analysis**

As I analyze the course of events that occurred during the climb, I come up with one solution and one lesson learned: First, the accident was merely that... an accident. Even though we took all precautions for this climb, both prior to and during, no one could have foreseen the rock being dislodged. Per the lesson learned: the lack of snow certainly aided in the loosening of the talus, which caused the rock to be dislocated (sic). Even though we were going up a narrow chute and we were spaced out between 75 to 100 feet between each of us, we should have ascended in a horizontal line rather than a vertical line, and if our proximity was still too close, then we should have ascended the chute one-at-a-time. (Source: Edited from a report submitted by Peter Francev.)

*(Editor's Note: We respectfully disagree with the notion that "no one could have foreseen the rock being dislodged." This inherent danger requires climbers' constant vigilance, especially under the conditions described. The unfortunate—but never unforeseen—part here is that the falling rock split in half and took a new trajectory.)*

## **PROTECTION PULLED OUT—FALL ON ROCK, INADEQUATE PROTECTION**

### **California, Yosemite National Park, El Capitan**

On May 17, Alexander Scola (28) and his partner (23) were on their first climbing trip to the U.S. from their homes in Germany. Scola had been climbing alpine and rock routes for over eleven years and climbed at a high level of difficulty. Most of his experience was in sport and traditional free climbing. He had about one year's experience with aid, however he was competent at placing protection. His partner had been climbing only two years. He had less leading skill and very little aid experience, so Scola was leading most of the pitches. Although they had climbed long alpine routes in Europe, this was their first big wall. This was their second day on the route. They were on schedule and the climb was going well.

Scola had led the King Swing from Boot Flake (pitch 17) and was leading pitch 18, aid-climbing a crack behind a long flake. Like many pitches on El Cap, the crack was of fairly uniform width. Although he carried three