

exceeding their abilities. Injuries included 15 fractures, five sprains/strains, two concussions, and two back spasms/pain. Thanks to Eric White's Mount Shasta Wilderness Climbing Ranger Report)

FALL ON ROCK, INADEQUATE PROTECTION

California, Yosemite National Park, Middle Cathedral

On May 6, I took a lead fall way bigger than I would have liked and got to have a couple fun helicopter rides because of it. Just thought I'd share what happened so that others might learn second-hand rather than first-hand.

So Thursday afternoon, the reality of the day diverged greatly from the original agenda for the day. My climbing partner and I went to climb the East Buttress of Middle Cathedral in Yosemite, which is eleven pitches. There's one pitch of 5.10a (mixed) and the rest are 5.8 or easier trad.

Things had been going pretty well and at about 3:00 p.m. we were at the top of the 8th pitch, which I was leading. I'd been feeling comfy and confident all day. Didn't feel in over my head or sketched out. I was up about 120 feet from where my partner was belaying me and had stopped to look for a place to put in a piece of pro. The area was certainly protectable, but required a little looking around rather than a perfect crack to just jam cam after cam into. My previous piece was a Black Diamond 0.3 C4 cam about 10 or 12 feet below where I was looking, which seemed reasonable given the relatively easy terrain we were on. I never felt uneasy or precarious.

I don't remember slipping, and I don't remember falling the 35-foot distance to pro, which happily held, x 2 plus a little lead slack plus rope stretch. Apparently I smacked a little 8–12-inch ledge or some other part of the rock, because it knocked me out for what my climbing partner thinks was about 30 seconds.

I don't remember climbing back up to the little ledge and I don't remember setting up an anchor and clipping in to it. I have vague recollections of resting there to try to clear my head, checking the lockedness of my 'biner several times and belaying my partner up to me.

After taking a bit of time to evaluate the situation and me asking my partner to check my anchor (apparently a few times), we decided that my obvious but unknown head injuries and back injuries made it too dangerous for us to go either up or down. Conveniently, Yosemite has a very well trained (and unfortunately often-used) Search and Rescue team very near. This is quite different from the normal alpine environment. My partner flipped through on one of our radios until she made contact with someone on the Nose who could get us help from below. We were put into direct radio contact with a guy from SAR, who checked on our whereabouts and condition and arranged for two SAR guys to climb up to us to meet us for a helicopter pick. It was great to be able to have constant contact with him.

When the SAR guys showed up, they quickly checked me out, checked out our anchor and gear situations, and noted that we were generally well prepared ;-). The helicopter showed up and dropped off the litter, they all got me loaded snugly into it, then got me clipped in to the haul-line when the helicopter returned, and off I flew down to the meadow below. All that took around three hours, which is ridiculously fast for getting a call out, a team organized, two guys up eight pitches of trad climbing, rescue gear dropped, rescue gear set up, and me picked up.

At the meadow I was transferred to a medic helicopter and taken to the hospital in Modesto, where they told me that I had suffered a pretty decent concussion, a few fractured lumbar vertebrae, a few more bruised vertebrae in the upper back, some bruised ribs, and a whole bunch of general scrapes and bruises. Could have been way worse.

Analysis

We (myself, my partner, and our friends that came with us) have done quite a bit of talking about what happened to figure out what we could have done better, what we did well, etc. The things I would have done differently include setting up an autoblock or some other back-up on my belay for my partner—given the situation, calling for help more quickly, and not falling. I try to make a habit of not falling, especially on gear. My partner noted that the fall could have happened to anyone, and I apparently looked really solid up until that point. All it takes is just a second to take you off the rock. There's a fine line between being in your groove and being over-confident

We talked a lot about the spacing of gear, and all felt that the spacing seemed reasonable for the difficulty of the terrain and the limited amount of gear that anyone climbs with. I guess a few things to note are that eight-inch ledges can be dangerous just like three-foot ledges, that those ledges get “closer than they appear” given all the rope stretch, and that maybe our definitions of “reasonable” need to be adjusted.

Things that we think we did well included a number of things. One, both staying levelheaded and rational the entire time. Two, calling for help when help was available rather than putting ourselves further into harm's way. (In an alpine environment or one in which help is a less reasonable alternative, we would have been forced to begin planning a self-rescue. We seriously considered that option.) Three, carrying radios. Four, my partner's attentive belaying. Five, both carrying enough gear on our harnesses and in our follower-pack to deal with an unplanned emergency situation. (Even the SAR guys ended up borrowing a couple small things.) As my partner pointed out, half an hour later or a bit windier would have put us there for the night. They even at one point asked if we were equipped to stay the night. Six, wearing our frickin' helmets (which we always do anyway).

We both think that it's incredibly important to thoroughly analyze and

evaluate our accident so that we can learn from it as best possible. We count ourselves as very lucky, but also have endeavored to stack the odds in our favor. The hard work, efforts, and risks taken by those that assisted us can never be understated. (Source Johanna Hingle, 28, from a posting on Mountainproject.com)

RAPPEL RIGGING ERROR – FALL ON ROCK, DISTRACTION

California, Yosemite Valley, Serenity Crack

On May 7, Brian Ellis (31) and Japhy Dhungana (25), his frequent climbing partner of several years, climbed Serenity Crack (three pitches, 5.10d) and Sons of Yesterday (five pitches, 5.10a), which starts at the top of Serenity. They began rappelling the routes using the Reepschnur method shown in the illustration, page 25. The climbing rope is passed through one or more rappel rings and knotted to a thin “retrieval” cord. The rappeller descends the single rope, supported by the knot jammed against the rings, while leaving the cord unloaded. In case the knot slips through the rings, a figure-of-eight loop is tied in the cord just below the rings and clipped to the rope on the rappeller’s side of the rings with a locking carabiner, thus securing the system. After the rappel, the rope is retrieved by pulling the cord. Advantages of this method include the ability to use single-rope descent devices and the reduced weight of the second rope for full-length rappels.

Ellis used the Reepschnur method because he favored rappelling with his Trango Cinch, an auto-locking, single-rope belay device. He typically joined the rope and cord with a flat overhand bend—in which the rope ends point in the same direction—backed up by a secondary overhand. (Again, see illustration.) Usually Ellis would go first, and then Dhungana would rappel with both the rope and the cord rigged through his ATC. Since he was no longer dependent on the security of the knot-jam, Dhungana would first disconnect the carabiner and untie the figure-of-eight loop to minimize the risk of the rope hanging up when they retrieved it. On this they were using a 10.2-mm rope and a 6-mm cord.

At the top of pitch 3 of Serenity Crack, Ellis rigged the next rappel through two rappel rings while Dhungana organized the 6-mm cord and chatted with a climber leading the pitch below. Dhungana checked Ellis’s rigging and then Ellis rappelled, carrying a bundle of the cord in his hand to keep it from tangling. After 20–30 feet, he stopped to photograph the climber as he led the crux section. He stayed there for about ten minutes, moved left and right for different photo angles, and then resumed his descent. Almost immediately he began to fall. Dhungana described it in an Internet post, “This is when I heard a pop and the sound of the rope whizzing. I tried to grab the [cord] with my bare hands and held on tightly as long as I could. My instinct even tried to wrap it around my waist for an