

**FALL ON ROCK, FATIGUED, PLACED NO PROTECTION, "TOO RELAXED"****Arizona, Cochise Stronghold**

Ever since my fall I have been reliving the events of that day, but I have also been psychoanalyzing why I fell. I can still vividly see the fall. I have also pondered, for weeks now, whether or not I should post my "accident". You see, for me the only justification for bringing this to light is the hope that someone—anyone—could benefit from my predicament and, hopefully, learn from it to reduce the possibility of a similar accident happening to them.

I was climbing in Cochise with a good friend the other week. Things were pretty much typical except, maybe, for the fact that I was running on little sleep and that I was in a negative mood. I tied in as usual and made my typical pre-climb assessments. I was confident enough, the grade was well within my ability; I was "up" for the climb. But, something was wrong. Something must have been wrong because I fell. Upon reflection I can clearly see that I was too relaxed. I was too mellow for the seriousness of the climb and, perhaps more specifically, the seriousness of the landing.

I led up maybe 15 feet feeling comfortable. I had not placed any gear. At one point I do remember looking at a placement, but decided not to put anything in because I was thinking I had to save the gear to finish the pitch. At one moment I stopped. At that moment I recall thinking, hey, I have no secure handholds and poor foot placements. I then recall thinking that I should put in a piece. But, in the split seconds that followed my right foot skated and the next thing I realized was that something was wrong; I was falling. I somehow turned myself around, sliding down the face with my palms on the very steep (near vertical) slab, my feet leading. In the next instant I was on the ground and my left foot was jammed into a crevice. The sole of my foot was up, my heel was extended down (I hyper extended my ankle; dorsi-flexion), my predicament only then coming to realization.

I have only one question for myself. That is, why had I stopped in (or perhaps more correctly, moved into) a place with no handholds and only marginal foot placements? Especially given that I had no gear in. This question haunts me a bit, because it makes no sense to me. Being comfortable on a route is not new to me, although I think that I may have been a bit too relaxed in this case. I can usually manage to increase my excitement level to a point consistent with my assessed level of the risk of the climb. Perhaps, in this case, I failed to do that.

I have a slight brake in my Talus, and the doc said that I would heal with little to no long-term problems. But, I want to learn from this experience and, yet, I am not yet quite sure what it is that I need to learn.

As a side note, I have witnessed multiple falls from climbers. In one case a friend zipped three pieces and landed at my feet, on his back, on top of the rope bag. To me the fall happened nearly instantaneously; it was over

(I thought) in a split second. Yet, for my fall, I can see all the events happening; I see myself sliding down, conscious of the fact that my palms were pressing against the rock, my feet in front of me, my knees slightly bent, and then the landing. I would surmise that it took less than 1 second, but I visualize it as a sequence of clear events with time to ponder and think about the event. (Source: David Arthur Sampson)

## **STRANDED – INABILITY TO REMOVE ANATOMICAL PROTECTION**

### **California, Yosemite Valley, Bishops Terrace**

On April 12, Tim Barthel (51), Jon Becker (50), Brant Herrett (55), and I, Steve Latif (46), decided to climb Bishops Terrace, a one-pitch 5.8 at the Church Bowl. At 1600 I started leading with Brant belaying. This was my first time on the route and about 80 feet up the pitch I found myself at a wide crack headed a bit to the right. It looked like the easiest option, so, thinking it was the standard line, I placed a cam and continued up.

A short way past my protection I realized I was in the off-width variation shown on the topo, not where I wanted be. The crack wasn't particularly hard and I'm comfortable leading most 5.10, but I'm not that experienced with wide cracks. Furthermore, I was already five to ten feet over my last piece and I didn't have any large pro for the next 15–20 feet. I was definitely outside my comfort zone, so I began backing down to the main crack.

My left leg was in the off-width and my right foot on the face. I moved down two or three feet and found that my left knee was getting stuck. Below me the crack constricted slightly, and the more I tried to free myself by pushing and pulling any way I could, the more stuck I became. After about five minutes of this, I was worn out and called down to my friends for help.

While Brant kept me on belay with my lead rope, Tim belayed Jon as he led up the normal route. When Jon was sufficiently above me, he rigged an overhead directional for his lead rope, allowing Tim to hold him in place. He had brought up another rope, the end of which he dropped to me. He clipped it to my harness and he belayed me off his harness, providing the security of a top-rope while I struggled. That didn't help much, so he rigged another directional, clipped my top-rope through it, and tried to provide me some lift by pulling down on his side of the directional with his bodyweight. With the friction in the directional carabiner and the fact that I outweighed Jon, that effort was doomed as well. We even lubricated my knee with water and Jon got under me and pushed up on my foot and my knee. Nothing worked. The knee stayed jammed and it was starting to hurt, and after 20 minutes of pulling and pushing, we were both tired. It was pretty clear I wasn't going anywhere.

Being April and almost 1900, it was going to get dark and cold, so I yelled down to Tim that we should call for help. He notified the NPS by