

up and to the rim of Sunset Rock. He was airlifted that evening to Erlanger Hospital in Chattanooga with a dislocated shoulder and a shattered left foot.

### **Analysis**

Experienced climbers in the area reported that the pair were sport climbers and were new to traditional climbing with little/no experience placing gear. The injured climber had been doing all the leading that day on new gear consisting of Trango cams and wires with a set of Camalots apparently “on order”. Witnesses also noted that earlier in the day the leader (later the patient) was having considerable difficulty placing gear on a 5.7 route and had to jump off the opening moves several times.

Poor preparation, limited skill and understanding on how to place gear, and route selection may have been the contributing factors leading to this accident. (Source: John McCutcheon, Supervisory Park Ranger, and others)

## **FALL ON ROCK – POOR COMMUNICATION**

### **Texas, Enchanted Rock State Natural Area**

On Saturday, April 16, several groups of climbers were climbing at or in close vicinity of the Echo Canyon and Triple Cracks area. These included a group of six climbers from Austin, three climbers from Houston, a group of approximately 15 Boy Scouts guided by the Mountain Madness guide service, and another smaller group guided by the OWA guide service.

Arik Yaacob (age unknown) in the Austin group was about to climb Grass Crack (5.10a) on a top-rope. Grass Crack is approximately 70 feet in length. Before Arik started, his belayer and another climber below realized that Arik would be the last person in their group to do the climb. They asked him if he was okay with cleaning the anchors, which consisted of two bolts. He confirmed that he was. They asked him if he had equipment that he could use to attach himself while cleaning, and he confirmed that he did. He then proceeded to climb and reached the anchors.

At the anchors, he attached himself to the bolts and called, “Off belay.” The belayer verbally confirmed that he was taking Arik off belay, then disconnected his belay device and walked away. There is a mild positive slope at the top of this climb, which means the top is not visible from the bottom.

At the top, Arik rigged himself for lowering and yelled, “Take.” He did not receive a verbal response. He yelled, “Take!” again. This time, he thought he felt the rope tighten and felt like he was being supported by it, so he assumed he was back on belay. However, climbers on the ground had not heard him yelling, “Take!” and so had not put him back on belay.

He disconnected himself from the anchors, called, "Lower me!" He leaned back and fell, hitting one boulder, then another, and then a tree. The base of the climb has many sharp rocks and uneven terrain; luckily, he landed in a very small flat area between the rocks. He slammed into the ground, landing on his back. Initially he did not move. He had fallen approximately 70 feet, from the anchors to the ground.

Initially, Arik did not appear to be breathing. His belayer, who had rushed to his side, was about to attempt CPR, but Arik suddenly started gasping for air and moaning. The OWA guide came over a few seconds later and stated he had Wilderness First Responder training. The OWA guide, along with a first-year medical student in the Houston group, and a guide from the Mountain Madness group, performed the initial assessment. Meanwhile, the head guide from the Mountain Madness group was able to scramble to a higher area with better cell phone reception and was able to contact the ranger station to request emergency response and a helicopter.

Approximately 20 minutes later, the EMTs arrived on foot. A helicopter arrived shortly after that and transported Arik to a hospital in Austin where he was diagnosed with six fractured ribs and multiple cuts and bruises. He is expected to make a full recovery.

### **Analysis**

The primary mistake was made when Arik weighted the rope expecting to be on belay but had not received a verbal confirmation. This lack of communication was facilitated by the fact that there is no clear line of sight between the top anchors and the belayer. The large number of people in the area may have also been a factor, as witnesses said that the Boy Scouts and other climbers were being very loud. This could have made verbal communication even more difficult. Climbers and belayers are encouraged to use names when communicating with each other, especially in congested areas.

Following the fall, other climbers found his ATC and several quickdraws scattered around the area, including one hanging in the tree he hit. Later examination of his harness revealed a broken gear loop. A possible explanation for the damaged items is that the quickdraws were damaged on impact with one of the boulders and somehow snagged some protrusion, ripping the gear loop. Another possible explanation is that the gear loop caught some part of the tree and ripped. Either of these situations would explain the scattered gear and could have further contributed to slowing of the fall. Finally, the fact that he was pulling the rope through the anchors as he fell may also have been a small factor in slowing the fall.

Though there was no head injury, there could have been, and it should be noted that Arik was not wearing a helmet. (Source: Neil Higa – edited from his post on rockclimbing.com)

*(Editor's Note: See Colorado, May 17 and July 9.)*