



## AAC Publications

---

### **Fall on Rock, Off Route, Placed No or Inadequate Protection**

Colorado, Eldorado Canyon State Park, Redgarden Wall

On May 24, Adam Kimmerly (32) and William Olszewski (51) set out to climb the Grand Giraffe (six pitches, 5.9+) on Redgarden Wall. William explains: We climbed the west face of Lower Ramp (5.2) to access Grand Giraffe Ledge and the start of our route. Adam led the first two pitches of Grand Giraffe, with me following. I led pitch three and brought him up to my anchor. Adam was set to lead pitch four, the crux, a consistently wide crack that pulls over a bulge and finishes on Redgarden's Upper Ramp. The guidebook (Eldorado Canyon, Steve Levin, Sharp End Publishing, 2009) calls for a standard rack to 3.5 inches for this route, and mentions that 5- to 6-inch gear is optional. We had nothing larger than a 4-inch piece. Adam started up the pitch, and at some point he determined that it was not wise to continue up the wide crack without larger gear and backed off to the anchor. We remembered that the guidebook also identified a pitch-four variation rated at 5.6 PG-13 that links up with Super Slab. Adam began leading that variation and disappeared from sight to climber's left, past an arête. Verbal communication was lost due to wind and the configuration of the rock. After a few minutes the rope went temporarily slack and then quickly tightened, signaling that Adam had fallen. From this position we had partial verbal communication, and I followed his instructions to lower him back to my anchor ledge. Adam is a SAR volunteer in San Diego County and self-diagnosed a fractured leg. After securing Adam to the anchor, I called 911 on my cell and was connected to Rocky Mountain Rescue. I handed the phone to Adam, as he has much more experience in such matters. I set a rap anchor, transferred our PAS tethers to the new anchor (utilizing a nut, four-foot sling, two carabiners, and an existing piton) and cleaned my initial gear anchor. We self-rescued to Grand Giraffe Ledge: Adam rappelled to an intermediate ledge with an anchor, then I rappelled; I clipped a carabiner to an existing sling and cordelette that were slung around a large boulder and fixed my 70-meter rope to it, as we were not sure of the distance to Grand Giraffe Ledge. Adam rappelled to the ledge. Upon realizing that the ledge was no farther than one-half the length of the rope, I reset the rope and rappelled to join Adam. By this time members of RMRG were on the ledge, attending to Adam. RMRG applied a vacuum splint to Adam's right leg and used an assisted lower to get him down to the ground. From there he was placed on a litter and carried down to and across South Boulder Creek. I drove Adam to a local hospital, where X-rays showed multiple compression fractures of the right tibia and fibula. He also had a bruised left heel and sprained left ankle.

### **Analysis**

What follows are the contributing factors to this accident, as I see them: We had insufficient gear for the crux pitch. While I do not hold the guidebook author or the publisher accountable in any way, we were under the impression that listing the larger gear as "optional" meant that the crux pitch could be led safely without such gear. In fact, that may be possible; however, Adam, an experienced climber, made the determination that it could not be led safely with the gear we had. This led him to opt for the pitch 4 variation instead of continuing up the route. The fact that said variation was listed as having a difficulty rating of 5.6 gave us the impression that pitch 4 could be circumvented with easy climbing. In retrospect, while the traverse from Grand Giraffe to the third anchor on Super Slab was indeed 5.6, this variation still requires climbing through the Super Slab crux at 5.10d, with sparse protection. While Adam is an accomplished and experienced climber, regularly redpointing slab routes at 5.11, falls are always a possibility, especially near the top of one's abilities. The crux of Super Slab requires micro-protection, of which we had very little, and most likely insufficient for the task. While the first ascent of this route utilized fixed protection for the crux in the form of hammered pitons, these pitons are long gone and have not been replaced with modern fixed protection, requiring climbers to use micro-protection that may not hold a lead fall. Conclusion: Had we better researched this route and

therefore understood that our options for pitch 4 were a wide crack requiring bigger gear or a difficult slab requiring suspect micro-gear, we would have chosen to climb something else. Had we at least understood that the pitch 4 variation to link up with Super Slab would require a difficult-to-protect 5.10d crux, we would have bailed without attempting the variation. Had the missing pitons at the crux of Super Slab been replaced with modern fixed protection, Adam's lead fall would have been minor, keeping him far away from the sloping ledge that caused his injuries. The bottom line is that a lack of knowledge of the routes, combined with a willingness to go for it and a little dumb luck, resulted in a big fall with serious injuries. (Source: William Olszewski.) (Editors note: The climbing party called 911 and provided precise details of their location, injuries, and plans, allowing faster rescuer access and prioritization of rescue and medical equipment. The ability to self-rescue expedited their rescue and is a fundamental skill all climbers should possess .)

## Images

## Article Details

|                |                   |
|----------------|-------------------|
| Author         | William Olszewski |
| Publication    | ANAM              |
| Volume         | 10                |
| Issue          | 66                |
| Page           | 49                |
| Copyright Date | 2013              |
| Article Type   | Accident reports  |