



## AAC Publications

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### **Fall on Rock, Protection Pulled**

New York, Mohonk Preserve, Birdland

On May 26 I was attempting to climb Birdland, which ascends the right side of a beautiful open book corner. As you traverse out right, you can clip a couple of older, large, angle pitons that are commonly found in the Gunks. These are much more substantial pitons than you will find at Seneca, and many have been replaced over the years. After moving past the corner and bulge with the pitons, I worked up to the crux moves at a shallow, right-facing corner. There was an old pin scar directly above and some small cracks above and slightly left. Looking for a placement (at this point about five feet plus above my last piece), I found the crescent-shaped crack/pin scar and placed a purple (#0) Master Cam vertically. From what I could see, the two front lobes were cammed perfectly. What I could not see were the two rear lobes. I wrongly assumed they were cammed the same as the front lobes. After several attempts to figure out the crux moves to the left, I stepped back down toward my piece and prepared to hang. I yelled "Take!" and sat back, and bam—the piece blew out, and down I went for a nice ride. As I was in free fall for a split second, my hand inadvertently reached out and grabbed the rope. It was completely reactionary, and I almost immediately let go. I did, however, receive a minor burn across my hand. The piece of protection below me was one of the old pitons, which held. Thankfully it was a clean fall and Mitch (my belayer) gave a nice catch. At that point, it was a mental battle to get back up there, but I eventually did. I hung there while someone threw me some tape so I could protect my hand. I got back on (backed up the piton this time), made two much better placements consisting of a brass offset and a BD C3 (not in the pin scar), hung on that, fell on that, and then finally worked through the crux exclaiming, "Seriously? You've got to be kidding me... That's all it was?!" The second pitch was wonderful, and I made sure to do the 5.9 overhang variation.

### **Analysis**

This was not the first time I'd had a piece of gear blow out on me, but it hadn't happened since I was a very young and more naive trad leader. Looking back, this was an incident that should never have happened, but it provided me with some exceedingly useful lessons, and for that I'm grateful. Lessons learned: 1. Make sure of those cam placements, especially with the smaller sizes. They can rip out more easily than the larger sizes, especially when your placement is half-crap. I should never have blindly trusted the placement, assuming that the inside of the crack was the same as the outer portion. The back two lobes were probably wide open. 2. Back up those old pitons if you use them, if at all possible. If that piton had blown, it would probably have been "game over" for me, or serious injuries at the least. 3. Give yourself all the time you need after a fall to collect yourself and figure out if you want to continue. There's nothing that says you have to continue, and I'm glad to know that I thought it through and decided to finish the route. 4. Whatever you decide to do, commit 100 percent to it. Reaching the end of the pitch after that battle was one of the highlights of my summer, and pulling the overhang at the end of pitch two was worth all the struggles on pitch one. It only happened because, once I made up my mind to continue, I was completely focused on that task. (Source: Andy Weinmann, 34.)

## Images

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