



## AAC Publications

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### **Fall on Rock, Inadequate Belay - Cam Device Open, No Backup Knots**

Massachusetts, Hammond Pond, Vittles Wall

On April 14 I was climbing Hominey (5.8) on the Vittles Wall, a 25-foot crag near Hammond Pond. I've been climbing for five years, and although I have easily completed routes rated more difficult than this, I have struggled and fallen repeatedly on the crux bulge at the top of Hominey. Although I was without a partner, I had a few free hours that morning and was in the area, so I decided to take another shot at Hominey on self-belay. I was using a Petzl Basic on a fixed line. The Petzl Basic documentation warns that the cam that locks on the rope can be jammed by foreign material and fail to close. Petzl recommends tying backup knots on a redundant line. Having repeatedly fallen on my Basic over the previous year without mishap, I neglected to tie backup knots. On other occasions I had felt that spending time and energy tying these knots weakened me just as I needed strength for hard moves. This time I easily reached the crux but, as usual, struggled to get over it. Twice, I decided to downclimb to a rest just below the bulge. Both times I had to open the cam on the Basic to allow the rope to pass through the device. On the third attempt, I popped off my holds and heard the rope whip through the device without any resistance. I had enough time during the fall to realize that, although it was unlikely that I would die, this would be a serious accident.

I landed on my left foot. The impact felt incredibly violent, and I could tell immediately that I had broken my left tibial plateau badly. I stood on my right leg to disconnect myself from the rope, and lay down to call 911. I had taken a wilderness first-aid course two years ago, and realized that blood circulation was important for the survival of my leg, so I straightened it into a position of function. The Vittles Wall is a bit off the beaten path, so I was on the phone for 45 minutes while the Newton firefighters looked for me. Eventually the 911 dispatcher suggested I yell to help them locate me. Another climber heard me yell and led the firefighters in my direction. The Newton firefighters did an incredible job carrying me out on a board. I spent the next 52 days in Beth Israel Hospital in Boston. I've had 13 surgeries, two metal plates, too many screws to count, and a post-op infection for nearly a year. I might need knee replacement surgery.

#### **Analysis**

I'm not sure why the cam did not close. It's possible that the tip of my belt managed to get into it and hold it open. It's also possible that after the second downclimb I left it locked in the open position, which is possible with the Basic.

(Source: Strep Treadway, 44.) (Editor's note: She mentioned not tying backup knots, but did not indicate whether they would have prevented grounding out. They may well have. Also of note is a recurring theme: the value of having taken a wilderness first-aid course.)

## Images

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