



AAC Publications

Fall on Rock, Lowering Error

Maine, Acadia National Park, The Precipice, Old Town

On July 17, Andrea Campanella (47), a guide with a local climbing company, was guiding two older teenagers on the South Wall of Champlain Mountain when he fell to the ground due to a lowering error. The exact sequence of events is not clear, due to memory deficits, and has been reconstructed from conversations with the clients and a nearby guide.

At roughly 1 p.m., after climbing several routes in the morning, Andrea led Old Town (5.7) to a two-bolt anchor with stainless-steel rings. It is believed that he then passed the rope through the anchor rings, set a directional piece, and was lowered down Connecticut Cracks (5.11), intending to demonstrate that climb for the stronger climber. On the ground, he likely pulled the rope taut through the anchor to the belayer and then clipped into the rope, roughly in the middle, via a figure-8 on a bigt and two carabiners (one locking). He then had the second client tie in at the end that he had just untied from. He demonstrated the moves on Connecticut Cracks and clipped the trailing rope into the directional. Upon reaching the anchor, he secured himself and belayed the stronger climber up CC, and then lowered the climber to the ground, at which point the climber likely untied. Andrea then detached himself from the anchor with the intent of being lowered, planning to clean pieces from Old Town and leave CC set up. Intending to be lowered via the rope on the Old Town side of the system (which would have had enough rope), he was actually lowered with the rope on the CC side, which did not have enough rope for him to reach the ground. He was lowered several feet and had removed several pieces from Old Town before the end of the rope slipped through the belayer's device and Andrea fell approximately 30 feet to the ground.

Local guide Dick Chasse, guiding on an adjacent route, reached Andrea in less than five minutes. He provided emergency care and called for NPS evacuation. Andrea was evacuated with personnel from the NPS and Mount Desert Island SAR, and was airlifted to Eastern Maine Medical Center. He suffered significant injuries to his head and chest. Fortunately, he has made a nearly full recovery.

Analysis

The above is a "best guess" as to how the accident occurred. There are a number of contributing factors as well, certainly the most important being that the end of the belay side of the rope was no longer secured at the time of lowering. Other factors may include miscommunication between the guide and the belayer, and an attempt to set up an overly complicated rope system.

Originally from Italy, Andrea has a 25-year climbing history that spans Europe, the U.S., and South America on a variety of rock, ice, and mountaineering routes. He holds a Ph.D. in biology and worked previously as a wildlife biologist. He recently completed the AMGA Rock Instructor course and had participated in several days of additional guide training. (Source: Jon Tierney, IFMGA Mountain Guide.)

(Editor's note: Jon Tierney also reported briefly that in June there was an accident in which a climber fell while soloing a tower at Monument Cove, resulting in significant injuries to the head, extremities, and spine. Late in the summer a guide fell from Central Slabs due to an improperly rigged rappel transition, resulting in significant leg extremity and minor spine injuries. In the fall a Camden climber fell after ascending a sport route because the rappel/lower was improperly set up.)

Images

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