



AAC Publications

Fall on Rock, Rappel Error - Uneven and Unknotted Ropes

New Hampshire, Cathedral Ledge, Child's Play

My climbing partner and I were involved in a rescue on July 23 when a climber in his early 20s fell while descending Child's Play (5.5) at Cathedral Ledge. We had just come down from Recluse at the North End and were packing up around 2:30 p.m. A party had finished Child's Play, the line directly to the right of Recluse. They were descending via rappel from a tree on the North End belay ledge. The first climber had thrown the ropes such that one end was about 25 feet above the ground. He had rappelled just past the bulging ledge about midway up Child's Play when the short end of the rope ran through his device. He fell to the ground, landing on his back. I inspected the rappel device. He had extended it and backed it up with a prusik, but the backup failed when one end, unknotted, slipped through.

He suffered serious lower back injuries, along with leg, arm, neck, and other injuries. He remained conscious the entire time, though in a lot of pain. Within 15 to 20 minutes of the fall, emergency services arrived, followed by SAR. He was stabilized, placed on a backboard, and carried out on a litter via the trail. He was in the ambulance by 3:30 p.m.

Analysis

It sucks that it takes an accident to reinforce the shit you already know you should do: Always tie knots in the ends of the rappel rope. I had rappelled to the ground just minutes before the accident, and I did not tie knots for the same reasons these climbers cited: "It's a short route, I've done the rap before, and I know the rope is long enough." Fortunately, I checked that I had my middle mark at the rings. These guys, for whatever reason, did not. One of the climber's friends had mentioned that they recently had a conversation about tying knots, and that the victim was normally a very safe climber. (Source: Anonymous.)

Images

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