Stranded, Inadequate Equipment

New York, Lake George, Rogers Rock, Little Finger

On October 13 my partner (27) and I climbed the route Little Finger on Rogers Rock, a three-pitch 5.5 with a descent by 60-meter rappels from bolted anchors to the right of our route. I brought a 70-meter (9.2mm) single rope, and a 75-meter (5mm) static rope to use as a tagline and pull cord, using a modified Reepschnur technique to rappel and retrieve my rope.

After finishing the climb around 4:45 p.m., we rappelled the first 60-meter pitch, anchored into the second set of rap anchors, and began to retrieve the rope using the 5mm tagline. We were able to pull the tagline about 20 meters but could pull no further. Despite our best efforts, including application of full body-weight force, we could see that the end of the single rope was not moving, roughly five meters above us. We felt it was not safe to ascend the thin line with our 5mm prusiks, and I did not feel safe free climbing up to the end of the lead rope, as I did not have any way to protect against a Factor 2 fall and the rappel was off the route line. Around 5:50 p.m. we saw a passing boat. We decided the safest way down was to yell and ask them to notify park rangers.

The park rangers were able to ascend the mountain via a hiking trail on the backside, set up an anchor, and lower in to retrieve the snagged rope system. The rescue ranger then took us down to the bottom of the remainder of the climb safely. Fortunately, secondary accidents and illnesses were avoided as we both had extra layers, headlamps, water, food, and well-charged cell phones.

Analysis

Although I have employed this method of rappelling, using a thin static tagline to pull a single rope, this experience made it clear that it has several potential drawbacks, particularly with an increased risk for getting the rope stuck during retrieval, due to the bulkiness of the knot. I had assumed the granite slab of Rogers Rock would be clean enough to use this method, but experience proved otherwise. There were several cracks and features on the rock where a knot could have easily gotten caught. Using a double or half rope system would have decreased this risk. Other accidents have been reported with incorrectly tied knots as well. In the future, I will only utilize this method when it is clear that the rappels are clean and there is low friction.

With regard to self-rescue, it may have been feasible to ascend the 5mm pull cord with my 5mm prusiks, but we felt it was too risky. It is possible that I could have safely ascended the rope without incident, but I was less zealous about pursuing this method for the following reasons: (1) risk of the rope becoming unstuck during ascension, and (2) uncertainty about the strength of the 5mm pull cord for ascending, given that it was under significant tension and possibly rubbing against the rock. (Source: Cedric Bien, 28.)

Images

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