



## AAC Publications

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### **Fall on Rock, Lowering Error - New Situation**

West Virginia, New River Gorge National River, Fern Buttress, Star Trek Wall

On August 26 my partner Sean (27) and I (28) were climbing Transporter Crack (5.6). Sean set up a Black Diamond ATC-Guide device in guide mode to belay me from above. When I was ready to lower, instead of taking me off belay and switching to a more practical lowering system, Sean decided to practice lowering using the autoblock device. Sean threaded a thin sling through the small “release hole” of the device and redirected it through a carabiner clipped to one of the anchor bolts.

As he began to lower me the tension released slowly, then when the device finally opened all the way it inverted, creating a pulley and causing me to gain momentum. Realizing that I was falling, Sean attempted to brake but couldn't hold my weight due to the increasing momentum. I experienced a virtual free fall for about 30 feet until I landed at the base of the climb.

Luckily, because of the relatively short distance of the fall and the fact that I landed on my butt, I was able to hike out under my own power after my group cleared my spine and checked my vitals. They contacted 911 and the Park Service. A ranger arrived on the scene to help coordinate local EMS and hiked out with the group. I was checked out and cleared by the EMS personnel, and driven out by fellow group members.

### **Analysis**

There were several oversights that caused the accident. First, Sean had used the lowering technique before, but never in a situation where a climber was being lowered from the top of a route. He had only used the technique for climbers that needed to be lowered a few feet while on belay. To the best of his knowledge, he believed the system would be adequate as a lowering technique in this situation. Not so. I should have clipped into the anchor as soon as I completed the route, and a more practical lowering system should have been implemented.

The primary cause of the fall was that Sean neglected to redirect the brake strand into a carabiner connected to the anchor above. In addition, Sean did not back up the brake strand with a friction knot made with webbing or cordelette, which should have been clipped back to his belay loop. (Source: Daniel Kessler.)

(Editor's note: Black Diamond recommends that belayers use a back-up belay when lowering a second climber with the ATC-Guide in autoblock mode. For example, the belayer can use a Munter hitch on a locking carabiner clipped to the belay loop on his or her harness. Black Diamond has produced a helpful video demonstrating lowering and other techniques using this device; search “ATC Guide” at YouTube.)

**Images**

Article Details

Author	
Publication	ANAM
Volume	10
Issue	67
Page	103
Copyright Date	2014
Article Type	Accident reports