



AAC Publications

Fall From Tyrolean – Faulty Use Of Equipment

Colorado, Clear Creek Canyon, East Colfax

On April 9, I had been clipping bolts at East Colfax with Mike Endicott, Leo Paik, Dave Rogers, and Doug Redosh. Mike and I decided to cross Clear Creek to climb at some other crags. The creek was too deep to wade, so an established double-rope Tyrolean traverse provided the obvious choice. The proximal ends of the ropes were attached to a small tree that leaned toward the creek over an eroding embankment.

Mike went first, commenting that clipping into the ropes for the traverse felt like 5.10. After he crossed the creek, I climbed the tree from the south side, as Mike did, and hung from a branch stub with my left hand as I struggled to clip in to the Silent Partner that I had placed on top of the ropes (which were now positioned below me). I had routinely used the Silent Partner as a double-rope pulley for smooth rides across Tyrolean traverses.

After succeeding in clipping my belay loop to the Silent Partner, I moved it back and forth along the ropes, noting that the sheave (the device's main drum or wheel) was above the ropes. However, I didn't recognize that the locking-carabiner attachment point was also above the ropes, and that when I let go of the tree and swung down, the device would flip and the sheave now would be under the ropes. This loaded the end of the Silent Partner that is only closed with two slim retaining rods. These broke under my weight, the device blew off the ropes, and I fell about 10 feet onto the edge of a slab, landing on my upper left femur. On a scale of one to ten, the pain level was at 12. I tumbled down over small boulders to the edge of the creek. I was instinctively preparing to swim, while thinking that I wouldn't be able to kick. The impact shattered the femur into many pieces and blew it out of the hip socket.

Analysis

The main lesson is to use a backup. If I had simply clipped a shoulder-length sling (or anchor tether) from my harness to the ropes, I would have ended up dangling from the ropes and not on the ground. My helmet and pack provided protection from other potential injuries. This wasn't a climbing accident. I fell from a tree instead of rock. Perhaps this should be written up for Accidents in North American Forestry. (Source: George Bracksieck.)

[Editor's note: The author, age 64 at the time of this incident, is a highly experienced climber. As he says above, he had used this device as a pulley many times. However, the manufacturer, Rock Exotica, states that the Silent Partner is designed as a self-belay device for leading and top-roping and should not be used for any other purpose, and also that the rope must be loaded into the device with a clove hitch tied around the device's central drum. The manufacturer does not recommend using it as a pulley.]

Images



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