



AAC Publications

Fall On Rock – Inexperience, Faulty Use Of Equipment

Colorado, Staunton State Park, Tan Corridor

I heard a scream and saw my rope falling below me. It was August 23, the day I almost died. After putting in six hours of rock climbing, we were ready to pack up and leave the Tan Corridor. I (Asha Nanda, 21) started up the climb called Reef On It to break down the anchor of our last climb. It was a 5.10- that Douglas Sargent Kern had led earlier in the day and left up for me to top-rope.

I got to the top, clipped into the anchor, and sat back in my harness to test my weight. "Off belay!" I called down to my belayer, Julie MacCready. I had clipped in with a single alpine draw, a sling with a carabiner taped into place at one end like a quickdraw. This supported my full weight from above as I leaned back and focused on setting up the rappel. As I was threading the rope back through the anchor, I felt myself falling. I experienced the rawest form of terror as the air whipped past, the wind carrying my scream to the ground. Startled by the scream, MacCready looked up to see my body plummeting downward. Kern jumped up and ran forward to try to catch me. With arms open and feet spread apart, he braced himself for the impact as my 125-pound body fell from about 60 feet up. I hit him in the chest and arms before bouncing onto the boulders and rolling a few feet.

I was flat on the ground, my back pressed against the rocks. Kern and Jennifer Lee immediately began assessing me for damage. MacCready dialed 911, while Erika Bannon, a climber who had seen the whole accident, ran down the mountain to guide rescuers to the scene. What seemed like only minutes later, Elk Creek Fire Department arrived with a large rescue party. They treated me for shock and loaded me onto a stretcher to carry me down the trail. I was taken to a landing zone and airlifted to a hospital in Denver, arriving two hours after the fall.

Seven hours later, a miracle was confirmed. No internal bleeding, concussion, or broken bones—every scan, test, and X-ray had come back negative. The medical staff was in awe. When my nurse heard what Kern had done, she shook her head in disbelief. "If he had not broken your fall, you could have died or at best ended up paralyzed for life." I walked out of that ER late that night with only bruises and scratches to show for my six-story freefall. When Kern is asked how he reacted with such speed and remained standing after the impact he states, "God is good."

Analysis

Never tape slings to create quickdraws. Always have redundant tethers to anchors. If you're new to climbing, advance cautiously and with respect for the risks.

[Editor's note: A similar incident occurred in the New River Gorge (2010). In this case, a Petzl String was installed at the ends of two slings along with locking carabiners. (The String is a rubber "keeper" designed to fit on the end of a quickdraw or runner in order to keep the lower carabiner in place for easy clipping and to protect the webbing from abrasion). After this accident a local climber climbed to the anchor and found a locking carabiner on each bolt with a String still affixed to each. Both Strings were torn on the side. Search "The Danger of Open Quickdraws" for an excellent short video from UKClimbing.com illustrating how such "alpine draws" can come unclipped.]

Images

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