



AAC Publications

Fall on Rock, Rappel Error - Uneven Ropes, No Knots

North Carolina, Pisgah National Forest, Little Lost Cove Cliffs

During the afternoon of April 12, a male climber (21) fell 70 feet while showing two friends how to rappel. After threading his ropes through the two-bolt anchor at the top of the cliff he began to rappel. Seconds later, his friends stated, the rappeller was out of sight and the rope pulled all the way through the anchor. He was found at the bottom of the cliff with hand and foot fractures, a dislocated shoulder, and head injuries. Rescuers carried the victim half a mile through the woods before reaching an ATV to take him another mile down a narrow trail to a hastily constructed helicopter landing zone. He was flown to Johnson City Medical Center in east Tennessee.

ANALYSIS

Rescuers stated that upon arrival at the scene they found the rope with a friction hitch (type unknown) wrapped around one strand of rope. They also noted that there were no blocking knots tied on the rope ends. It appears the climber failed to equalize the rope ends and misjudged the height of the cliff. He likely rappelled off one end of the rope, causing it to pull through the anchor. A correctly tied rappel backup, incorporating both rope strands, and blocking knots likely would have prevented this incident. (Source: Corey Winstead, Appalachian Mountain Rescue.)

Images

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