



AAC Publications

Fall on Rock – Inadequate Tree Anchor

Colorado, Boulder Canyon

On August 16, 2014, a guide (uncertified) took four clients (two males and two females in their 20s) to a top-rope climbing area in Boulder Canyon. None of the clients had climbed before.

The clients first did two routes that had anchor bolts with chains at the top. The clients successfully climbed them and were then lowered, being belayed by other clients and the guide.

To set up the third top-rope, the guide used a single anchor: a sling tied around a tree less than six inches in diameter, with a shallow root system. One client successfully climbed the route and was lowered. Another client did the climb and was also lowered to the ground. This same client then tried again, reached the top, and began downclimbing. He was about about 30 feet from the ground when he fell. The guide was belaying him, but the tree came loose and the client (and the tree) fell to the ground.

The climber's helmet was cracked and bloody, but he was conscious and wanted to get up. After a call to 911, Boulder County sheriff's deputies arrived in 15 minutes, followed by an ambulance. The injured climber was transported to the hospital, where he was diagnosed with a broken wrist, shattered ribs, and a concussion. His recovery took over a year, and he still suffers some memory loss.

ANALYSIS

Local climbers indicated that they did not use this particular tree as an anchor because of its small diameter, shallow root system, and dry, shallow soil on top of the cliff. The guide was reported to have said that a living tree is OK if it is over three inches in diameter. A minimum of five or six inches is the accepted standard. A very healthy, well-rooted three-inch tree might be considered, but only as a redundant anchor point. The clients and other climbers nearby pointed out that the guide did not test the anchor. (Source: Jed Williamson, from local reports and interview with the injured climber.)

Images

Article Details

Author	Jed Williamson
Publication	ANAM
Volume	11
Issue	69
Page	59
Copyright Date	2016
Article Type	Accident reports