



AAC Publications

Fall on Rock – Unable to Clip Anchors, Inadequate Belay

Kentucky, Red River Gorge, Drive-by Crag

During the early afternoon on October 17, some friends and I were climbing at Drive-By Crag. My friends didn't have much outdoor climbing experience. Over a couple of days, I had been watching Jake belay his partner, and I felt confident that he paid attention and was managing the rope appropriately.

I had attempted to lead Breakfast Burrito (5.10d) on an earlier visit. With this knowledge, I made it past my original high point, clipped the last draw before the chains, and shook out before finishing. I couldn't get into a good position to clip the chains, and I spent a fairly long time on a somewhat bad hold and began to tire. I was about four feet from the chains and began to evaluate whether I should try to clip or if I should take the fall. I opted for the fall, yelled "Falling!" and making sure my feet were clear from the rope.

Instead of falling cleanly, I slammed into the rock knee-first, fracturing my left kneecap. I was lowered to the ground, where climbers assisted me and an ER nurse monitored my condition. I was carried out to our vehicle and driven to the ER in Irvine. A few days later, I saw an orthopedic surgeon who decided on a surgery that would repair my patellar tendon and remove bone fragments.

ANALYSIS

According to the others, Jake took in slack and braced himself for a hard catch. He is about 45 pounds heavier than me, and he said he never left the ground while catching my fall. If Jake had adequate slack in the system, or had jumped into the fall, my injury may have been avoided. I spoke with him after the accident, and he noted that he was unfamiliar with the concept of a "soft catch." He stated that he thought the belayer was automatically falls on lead his partner gets pulled up. Additionally, when he belayed his partner, she would yell at him to keep the rope tight. I realize now that when I was watching Jake to evaluate his belaying abilities, I never watched him catch a fall. Whenever he was lead belaying on our trip, everyone was climbing easier climbs well below their abilities. I shouldn't have made assumptions about what my partner knew and didn't know. (Source: Grant Warman.)

Images

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