



AAC Publications

Fall on Rock – Inadequate Protection, Inexperience

New York, Adirondacks, Wallface

On August 17, a 23-year-old male climber fell while leading the second pitch of Diagonal (5.8, seven pitches) on Wallface, a 700-foot cliff five miles from the trailhead. The leader had gotten off-route on the broken and bushy second pitch (5.5, with harder variations). Reportedly, he was hanging on a cam and yelling up to other climbers for directions when the cam pulled out. He may have pulled one or more additional protection pieces. He fell an estimated 60 to 80 feet, likely hitting some ledges and “crashing through a small tree island,” which may have slowed the fall and prevented a fatal accident. He was wearing a helmet. The fall stopped 200 feet above the ground, about 40 feet above the top of the first pitch.

Two climbers on the third pitch rappelled to help the patient and his partner. There was no cell phone signal on the cliff, but, fortuitously, a friend of the climbers, watching them from a point near Indian Pass, saw the fall and called for help. A ranger and volunteer climber rescuer were inserted by helicopter near the foot of the cliff and climbed the first pitch to reach the scene, reaching the ledge at 5:20 p.m. A litter was raised to the ledge, and a system was rigged to lower the climber in the litter to the scree slope below.

Additional rangers had arrived on scene, and they helped carry the litter with the injured climber down the scree to an area where a helicopter could hoist the litter aboard and transport the climber to the hospital. (Sources: Climbers and rescuers at the scene, N.Y. Department of Environmental Conservation report, news reports.)

ANALYSIS

According to one of the other climbers on the route that day, this was not only the rescued party’s first multi-pitch climb but also its first trad climbing experience. It would have been better to develop these on shorter routes much closer to the road than a large backcountry cliff like Wallface, where loose or wet rock, route-finding challenges, time pressure, and weather concerns add several layers of difficulty and seriousness to a climb. (Source: The Editors.)

Images



The Diagonal follows a long ramp line in the left center of Wallface. The 2015 accident occurred on the tree-dotted pitches below the ramp.

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