



## AAC Publications

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### **Stranded – Darkness, Inadequate Communication**

North Carolina, Hanging Rock State Park, Moore's Wall

**After completing one climb on September 17, Eli Huneycutt (20) and Will Apple (36) began climbing Zoo View (5.7+), a classic two-pitch route.** Huneycutt successfully led the first pitch to the Crow's Nest belay ledge. Apple began the second pitch, but was unable to negotiate a roof section. It was becoming dark and the pair decided to retreat. Apple left some gear under the roof so he could retreat to the Crow's Nest. From here they were able to rappel to the ground.

Before leaving the area, they decided to retrieve the gear they'd left behind. They scrambled to the top of the route and set up a rappel with their 70-meter rope. Apple descended over the roof and then realized the doubled rope (with rope ends knotted) was too short to reach the Crow's Nest. Huneycutt noted, "All of a sudden he says, 'I'm at the end of my rope, literally'.... I really got scared at one point where he was able to touch the rock wall and was able to stand up. I felt the weight go off of the rope and yelled down to him, 'Are you still there?'"

The confused communication caused Huneycutt to call rescuers and say he and his climbing partner were stranded on Moore's Wall, when in fact Apple had already begun a self-rescue. Apple executed a leg wrap with the remaining rope to halt his rappel and was able to retrieve the gear left behind. Using the equipment he had with him (mostly slings and carabiners), he was able to ascend the rope more than 100 feet, taking approximately one hour to rejoin Huneycutt. They met rescuers as they were walking out the trail. (Sources: Will Apple, news reports.)

### **ANALYSIS**

Climbers should familiarize themselves with descent routes and equipment requirements before attempting an unknown descent. A second rope would have been helpful in this situation, along with a headlamp. (Apple was able to use his smartphone as a light source.) In most cases, attempts at self-rescue should be exhausted before calling for rescue. With some effort and improvisation, Apple successfully got himself out of a difficult spot. Once they were both on top, the climbers should have called back to inform rescuers they were safe. (Sources: Will Apple, Karsten Delap, Aram Attarian.)

## Images

## Article Details

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