



AAC Publications

Leader Fall – Rope Behind Leg

Colorado, Garden of the Gods, Red Twin Spire

My climbing partner, Warren (23), and I (28) had come to Garden of the Gods during a climbing and hiking trip to Colorado from our home in Kentucky. It was almost 8:30 p.m. on July 23 by the time we finished hiking around the park, but we felt there was still enough time to sneak in a quick climb. One route seemed within our abilities: Potholes, a 5.7 route on a 60-foot sandstone spire, protected by two bolts and three pitons. We figured we'd make a quick climb of it before dark.

The route was casual, so it barely registered when I fell, about a foot below the fourth bolt. One second I was climbing and the next I was hanging upside down. Warren yelled out, "Are you good?" I replied, "Yeah, I'm good," but as I adjusted myself, I saw that my foot was pushed sideways. As I was falling, my right foot had caught behind the rope, shifting my weight so that my left foot hit the wall hard as I was inverting. Warren lowered me to the ground. Thanks to spectators below the climb, an ambulance was on the site within 30 minutes, and paramedics swiftly treated my dislocated ankle.

ANALYSIS

One of the bystanders caught my fall on video, and I have watched it dozens of times. (The video was highlighted as a Rock and Ice Weekend Whipper.) One of the major contributions to the injury was inadequate body awareness during the fall. Watching the video, I could see my body slide stiffly down the wall. Keeping my arms and legs relaxed and bent, out of the rope's way and ready to absorb impact, might have prevented the injury. Taking some controlled practice falls might ingrain better muscle memory for safer falls.

Although I did not sustain a head injury, I should have been wearing a helmet. Since I flipped over, my head traveled about 15 feet from its high point to low point. If the piton that caught me had pulled out, I would have fallen an additional 10 feet. In hindsight, it would have been smart to bring supplemental protection. (Source: Philip Rodriguez.)

Images

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