



AAC Publications

Fatal Rappel Error – Uneven Rope Ends, No Stopper Knots, No Helmet

Utah, Indian Creek Canyon, Way Rambo

Mark Davis was 50 years old and had been climbing for 25 years, with successful ascents of El Capitan and routes in Patagonia. He was well loved by his community in Salt Lake City and around the country. On Saturday, March 12, Mark and friends were finishing a beautiful day of climbing at Way Rambo crag in Indian Creek. Mark had finished a lead of the namesake route Way Rambo. Some requests were given for a top-rope and a fixed line for a photographer, so, in typical Mark fashion, he climbed the route again on top-rope to swap out the ropes for others. Now his rope would be free of the route and could be used as needed.

Mark pulled his rope through the anchors and prepared to double-rope rappel on a tube-style device. Thirty feet before reaching the ground, Mark fell to the ground headfirst, hitting once and then tumbling and hitting again. He had no external injuries or lacerations; he had suffered a blunt-force trauma to his head. A rescue was launched within seconds. Two groups ran to the road to call for help, and five of us tended to Mark, clearing his airway and helping him to regain his breathing. We wrapped his body in warm clothes and secured his head and spine. After five minutes, his breathing began to decline, until eventually we began CPR that ultimately was not successful.

ANALYSIS

Upon review, it seems Mark had seen one side of his rappel rope go behind a pillar about 20 feet off the ground and had assumed the end would reach the ground. After the accident, only one strand of rope was threaded through his belay device, and the entire rope was on the ground. It seemed clear that his rappel rope had not reached the ground on both sides. This is likely one of the most common forms of climbing accidents and tragedies, and it happens to the best of us. It's an easy mistake to make when the rope is not visible entirely from above.

On analysis, if Mark had worn a helmet or tied stopper knots in the ends of his rope, the outcome might have been different.

Those of us on this rescue ask others to remember to slow down, double-check your ropes, double-check your rappel device, double-check your knots, wear a helmet, and back up your rap so you can climb again tomorrow. (Source: Jeremy Collins.)

Images

Article Details

Author	Jeremy Collins
Publication	ANAM
Volume	11
Issue	70
Page	92
Copyright Date	2017
Article Type	Accident reports