



AAC Publications

Ground Fall – Small Cams Pulled Out

New York, Adirondacks, Chapel Pond Pass

Our party of six, with three experienced climbers and three newbies, headed to the Lower Beer Walls on June 25. I chose to lead a 5.8 trad route, Rockaholic, a left-leaning finger crack on polished granite.

As I started up the climb, I placed a nut and then a micro-cam. My third placement was also a micro-cam, a 0.2 Black Diamond X4, in a flared crack. There was a better place in the crack for the cam, but I didn't want to block a good handhold. By this time I was about 40 feet off the ground and getting pumped out, so I quickly placed a 0.4 Black Diamond X4 and leaned back to rest on the rope. But the cam shifted as I weighted it, and I watched it slide out. As I fell, the 0.2 cam also pulled out, and I hit the ground on my left side. Two climbers from Québec, certified EMTs, heard the fall and came over to assess and treat my injuries. I escaped with a laceration and abrasions to my left bicep, strained and torn groin muscles, and general bruising.

ANALYSIS

I should have been more cautious, given my relative inexperience on crack climbs. If I had asked one of the more experienced climbers to belay me, he might have been able to coach me about a bomber placement I missed about 30 feet up. My third placement could have been better, which would have prevented the ground fall; I was concerned about blocking holds, but if given the opportunity again, I would favor a more solid cam. I also should have truly tested the fourth cam before weighting it.

(Editor's note: Micro-cams generally have far less margin of error in their placements than larger cams. See "Micro-cams: What to Expect, How to Optimize.") **Finally, when I started feeling uncomfortable I could have retreated, but I felt I had to push on. I should have lowered before I got pumped out.**

(Source: Alan Jenn, 28.)

Images

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