



AAC Publications

Leader Fall – Inadequate Protection

North Carolina, Linville Gorge Wilderness, Shortoff Mountains

During the morning of February 6, SO and his partner started the three-pitch classic Dopey Duck (5.9). Both were experienced climbers, and SO had climbed the route before. SO began leading the first pitch, placing three solid pieces. Somewhere above the third placement, he fell approximately 25 feet. He landed feet-first on the large pillar near the base of the climb before the rope came tight. He then swung back into the wall, striking his head and cracking his helmet. He suffered a tib/fib (lower leg) fracture.

SO's partner and other climbers on the scene provided care, stabilizing the patient and protecting against hypothermia. A HART (Helicopter Aquatic Rescue Team) crew out of Charlotte assisted in the rescue, helicoptering the patient from the base of the cliff. (Source: Adrian Hurst.)

ANALYSIS

Solid protection and a competent belayer are essential to reducing the risk of a fall. SO had both. However, it is also important to consider terrain features that may influence the outcome of a fall. Protection should be placed more frequently when close to the ground or above ledges. The helmet SO wore may have prevented another serious injury. (Source: Aram Attarian.)

Images

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