



## AAC Publications

---

### **Stranded – Inexperience, Darkness**

North Carolina, Linville Gorge Wilderness, The Amphitheater

**On September 17, four climbers set off to attempt the Prow (5.4), a classic three- or four-pitch route in the Amphitheater. All four had significant gym climbing experience. However, this would be their first time climbing outdoors on a multi-pitch trad route.** The four divided into two teams, with the first starting up the route at approximately 8:30 a.m. They carried limited rock protection and insufficient clothing and water (all of their water was gone by 1 p.m.).

Both parties completed the first pitch without too much difficulty, although moving slowly. The second pitch presented some route-finding challenges for Pair 2, causing them to downclimb to the start of the pitch and start over. Both parties met at the top of the second pitch late in the day. By now it was getting dark, and the group had only two headlamps among the four climbers.

Pair 1 was able to complete the exposed finish of the climb with no difficulty, and they left a rope along the route to guide Pair 2 to the top. However, this rope was not secured and when Pair 2 pulled on it, the rope dropped and no longer showed the way. In darkness, Pair 2 attempted to continue but could not find the correct route. One of the climbers was cold and exhausted and refused to continue.

Pair 1 waited on top until well after dark before calling 911, in hopes that Pair 2 would be able to finish. Due to the distance and wind, Pair 1 lost voice contact with Pair 2, and they did not feel comfortable downclimbing to Pair 2's location. Pair 2 stayed on the large ledge at the top of pitch two and waited for rescue.

Rescuers arrived sometime after 11 p.m. Once voice contact and a visual on Pair 2's headlamp was established, a single rescuer rappelled directly to them. Pair 2 had an anchor with three well-placed cams and was secured behind boulders in an effort to get some relief from the wind. Clothing, water, and food were provided. Both individuals were uninjured but tired and frustrated with each other.

Rescuers atop the cliff set up a 3:1 haul system to assist the two climbers up the final pitch. The climbers were raised individually, taking approximately 30 minutes apiece. Assisted by rescuers, all the climbers then walked back to their vehicle. (Source: James Robinson.)

### **ANALYSIS**

The 5.4 rating may have enticed these climbers to this route. Although the climb may be technically easy, the challenges of a tricky approach, route-finding, rope management, and traditional protection would make this a big step for climbers who are exclusively gym-trained. Finding an experienced mentor and/or building experience on shorter routes are more appropriate ways to venture onto new types of terrain. This incident is also a good reminder to carry adequate food, water, clothing, and headlamps for longer routes, even if you expect them to go quickly. (Source: Aram Attarian.)

## Images



Approximate line of the Prow, showing the location of the stranded climbers at the end of the second pitch of the climb.

## Article Details

Author	James Robinson and Aram Attarian
Publication	ANAM
Volume	11
Issue	70
Page	78
Copyright Date	2017
Article Type	Accident reports