



AAC Publications

Ground Fall – Inadequate Equipment, Inexperience

Arizona, Flagstaff Area, The Pit

On September 9, at 1:20 p.m., Coconino County Sheriff's Office and other agencies responded to a report of a 12-year-old male, Person 1, who took a 20-foot ground fall while lead climbing. Upon arrival, responders found Person 1 at the base of Microwave, a short 5.11 sport climb. He had lost consciousness for approximately one minute and had shown decorticate posturing immediately after the fall, suggesting a possible brain injury. He also had a fractured right wrist. He was packaged in a litter and transported to Flagstaff Medical Center for treatment.

An investigation revealed that this was the first climb of the day for the party of three. Starting up the route, Person 1 clipped single carabiners to each bolt, with the rope clipped directly through them (no quickdraws). Person 1 had clipped the first two bolts with these carabiners and was in the process of clipping the third bolt when he fell. The carabiners clipped to the first two bolts both broke, resulting in the subject landing at the base of the climb.

ANALYSIS

Person 1 had climbed outside a few times prior to this incident, but most of his experience was in a climbing gym. He had purchased the carabiners that broke from Amazon.com. The carabiners were stamped "Not For Climbing" along the spine; however, the spine on each carabiner had been wrapped with athletic tape, making it difficult to inspect the equipment and determine if it was appropriate for climbing. The other members of the party (both adults with some climbing experience) had not double-checked the equipment before it was used.

Carabiners that are not rated for climbing activity should never be used for climbing, nor should the strength rating or other safety information on equipment be covered up. It's best to avoid carrying non-climbing hardware on a route to prevent any chance of confusion; very small but full-strength carabiners are available to carry nut tools, chalk bags, etc.

Person 1 was wearing a helmet when he fell, which may have prevented additional injury. (Source: Aaron Dick, Coconino County Sheriff's Office.)

Images



Broken carabiner and the 5.11 route Microwave at the Pit.



Tape covering the spines of carabiners that broke in an accident at the Pit.



One side of a carabiner that broke in an accident at the Pit, near Flagstaff.



The spine of this carabiner was clearly marked "Not For Climbing," but the words were covered with tape. The carabiner broke during a climber's fall at the Pit near Flagstaff.

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