



AAC Publications

Fall on Rock – Failure to Clip Anchor

Colorado, Eldorado Canyon

On May 12, 27-year-old Conor Felletter and his climbing partner, Kelly Kochanski, were climbing Werk Supp, a two-pitch 5.9 route. After completing the first pitch, Felletter decided to head over to the Bastille Crack, a popular five-pitch 5.7 that already had another party on it. He climbed an easy gully for 80 feet to join the fourth pitch of the Bastille Crack. Continuing up that pitch, Felletter passed the traditional belay stance, already occupied by the other party, and began to set up an anchor higher and to the left. He placed one solid cam but did not clip it right away, focusing instead on placing a second piece for his anchor. Before he could place the second piece, he slipped.

Felletter fell 40 feet, flipping upside down and hitting his head on a rock, which split his helmet and gashed his forehead. He was unresponsive at first but regained consciousness and motioned for Kochanski to lower him to a ledge. Another climber reached the ledge and helped Kochanski secure Felletter. This second climber also called 911. The patient stated that his neck hurt, and he was drifting in and out of consciousness.

Rocky Mountain Rescue Group (RMRG) responded within the hour, rappelling to the climbers' position from the top of the Bastille. After evaluating Felletter's injuries and stabilizing him, a lowering system was rigged. Felletter was secured in a litter and lowered to the ground to a waiting ambulance. He suffered seven broken vertebrae in his neck, three broken ribs, a torn elbow ligament, many lacerations, and moderate brain trauma. He attributes being alive to his helmet and the quick response of the RMRG.

ANALYSIS

The place where Felletter attempted to set up his anchor was dirtier and wetter than the main route, and it is possible he slipped on loose debris. Although some climbers like to complete an anchor before clipping in (perhaps waiting until they have a master point linked to all the anchor components), it requires no significant time or effort to temporarily clove-hitch the rope to your first solid anchor piece or clip your personal tether to it. Rescuers noted that Felletter's first piece was good and likely would have held his slip. (Sources: Rocky Mountain Rescue Group, published accounts, and the Editors.)

Images



verRocky Mountain Rescue evacuates a patient from the Bastille in Eldorado Canyon.

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