



## AAC Publications

---

### Ground Fall – Protection Pulled Out

Colorado, Eldorado Canyon, Rincon Wall

**On March 27, Japhy Dhungana (32), Eric Whewell, and Rainbow Weinstock were climbing at the Rincon Wall, projecting single-pitch trad-climbing routes.** All three are very experienced climbers; each is an AMGA-certified rock guide. Each person had a separate project he was working in “headpoint” style. It was Japhy’s second day attempting the Evictor (5.12d R), and he had practiced his gear placements and climbing beta, including successfully top-roping the route while “mock-placing” gear along the way. After five attempts that day, three of which were successful sends on top-rope, Japhy began a lead attempt late in the day, around 4 p.m.

Japhy started up the route with just the right gear on his harness. The lower one-third of this climb is considered the “safety crux,” with sparse gear placements over challenging climbing, and this section was dispatched without trouble. At the halfway mark, there is one horizontal crack with a decent rest. At this horizontal crack, Japhy placed number 0.75 and 0.5 Black Diamond Ultralight Camalots adjacent to each other, equalized by a single quickdraw clipped to both of the cams. This horizontal crack offered the best protection on the whole route, and the two cams nested together created a “mini-anchor” that would help protect the upper climb.

Above this horizontal crack, the “redpoint crux” is a long sequence of sparsely protected 5.12 moves. In a shallow crack, Japhy placed a 0.4 Ultralight Camalot and a 0.75 Ultralight Camalot. Both placements were good, but due to the shallowness and shape of the crack, they were not very deep and the stems could not be oriented toward the direction of load (i.e., they were pointing outward from the vertical crack). Japhy climbed past the crux moves and reached for the finishing jug, where a bomber nut could be placed. At this point, he was about 10 feet above the last piece of protection (the 0.75 Camalot). He could not control the final jug and slipped off, expecting to take a 25- to 30-foot fall. Instead, he landed on the ground next to his belayer after a 70-foot ground fall. Four pieces of gear had ripped from their placements, and the belayer never felt the rope come under tension.

Although Japhy suffered significant injuries (fractured pelvis, fractured sacrum, fractured lumbar spine, concussion, and significant internal bleeding), he was soon able to return to climbing and working as a guide. His helmet likely protected him from a more serious head injury. He is grateful to all of the rescue personnel and is glad to be able to continue climbing with more humility and experience.

### ANALYSIS

Upon significant reflection, it seems highly likely that the upper pieces pulled out after rotating in their shallow placements due to the strong downward force of a leader fall applied to the stiff stems of the cams. Japhy knew these the upper pieces were not 100 percent, which is why he had doubled up the pieces just below.

The real surprise in this incident is the failure of the two pieces of protection in the horizontal crack. These were in a deep crack in good rock. They were placed next to each other, well seated, and within a good camming range. They were so close to each other that they could be clipped with a single quickdraw. Yet both cams ripped—the rope did not come unclipped from the rope-end carabiner. Although this is speculation, it seems likely that the high force of the fall may have caused one of the two nested cams to knock the other one out of position, much like a bowling ball hitting pins. It is

worth wondering: Would placing just one of these cams have been safer? It's also possible that the smooth rock inside this climb's cracks may have affected the cams' holding power.

Another speculative possibility is that Ultralight Camalots, with their narrower cam lobes and slightly stiffer plastic housing, may not have been the right choice for this route. A camming unit with a more flexible stem, especially in the upper two placements, might have been less likely to pull out. A lesson here is that having a range of protection options, and not just relying on one style of cam, could help protect complex routes such as this, where precise gear beta is essential.

Finally, headpoint-style climbs like this are dangerous, and large lead falls on traditional gear can have unpredictable results. A more fastidious selection of camming devices appropriate to the route, not attempting to lead the route after a full day of climbing, and perhaps testing the critical gear placements before a lead attempt would all be good strategies for climbs like this. (Source: Japhy Dhungana.)

Japhy told his story in person in Episode 24 of the Sharp End Podcast:

**Images**

Article Details

Author	Japhy Dhungana
Publication	ANAM
Volume	11
Issue	71
Page	61
Copyright Date	2018
Article Type	Accident reports