



AAC Publications

Belayer Pulled Into Wall – Miscommunication

Kentucky, Red River Gorge, Miller Fork Natural Preserve, Fruit Wall

On April 29, a 25-year-old male was belaying a 22-year-old male climber on JewJew Fruit (5.10c) at Fruit Wall. The climber, who was attempting to flash the route, had progressed to just below the seventh bolt. He clipped a quickdraw to the bolt and pulled up slack a number of times in an attempt to clip the rope, but each time dropped it. The belayer could tell he was getting close to the failure point.

With the rope in his hand, the leader yelled “take!” and the belayer, hoping the leader had managed to clip the seventh bolt, took in an arm’s length of slack and then saw a “bunch” more rope fall toward him. The belayer moved backward, about 10 feet away from the cliff, without the rope coming taut. At this point the climber (who, in fact, had not clipped the seventh bolt) fell off and pulled the belayer rapidly into the wall, fracturing his right calcaneus (heel).

ANALYSIS

While the leader and belayer had climbed together, they were not regular partners. The belayer later said that none of his regular partners would have yelled “take” when he was still trying to clip the next bolt and was well above the previous bolt. Initially, the belayer said, he had been stationed close to the wall with a “slight J” of slack in the rope leading from his Petzl Grigri 2 to the climber, but he moved backward in an attempt to take up the surprising amount of slack when the leader asked him to “take.” The climber also outweighed the belayer by 35-40 pounds, and this likely contributed to the severity of the pull. (Sources: The belayer, belayer’s Mountain Project post, and the Editors.)

Images

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