



AAC Publications

Three Falls on Rock – Protection Pulled Out

New Hampshire, Cathedral Ledge and Kancamagus Highway

On July 10, two climbers headed to the Barber Wall, a single-pitch crack climbing area on the upper left side of Cathedral Ledge. The pair decided to get on Nutcracker, a popular 5.10a. The leader (male, 30s) placed a number 2 Camalot, followed by two small cams below a little overlap or overhang. In order to protect the upper part of the climb, he back-cleaned the number 2. As he attempted the overlap, he fell. Both of the remaining cams ripped out and the climber fell to the ground, 30 feet below, hitting his belayer in the process.

A nearby climber responded to the accident and called for help. Shortly thereafter, the North Conway Fire Department and volunteers from the Mountain Rescue Service arrived and carried the patient in a litter up to the parking lot and tourist overlook on top of Cathedral Ledge, roughly 200 feet above the Barber Wall. The climber sustained minor fractures to vertebrae, a broken rib, and a lung contusion.

On October 2, an aid climber (male, 30s) was leading the first pitch of a potential new route at the Painted Wall, a cliff off the Kancamagus Highway. Though it was not this climber's first time up the pitch, on this occasion a piton ripped out as he weighted it, and the force of his fall pulled out two more pitons and an Alien cam. The climber estimated he fell 15 to 18 feet before landing on the ground, seemingly injuring his leg (subsequent X-rays revealed a hairline fracture on his pelvis).

The pair of climbers telephoned two friends who came to help, and the four of them attempted to hike down the talus field at the base of the Painted Wall to the parking lot. When it became clear that self-evacuation was not an option due to the patient's pain level, the climbers called Mountain Rescue Service, who packaged the victim in a litter and carried him to the road.

On the weekend of October 14, two climbers hiked to Woodchuck Ledge, also on the Kancamagus Highway, to attempt Screaming Yellow Zonkers, a 5.11c crack climb. The leader (male, 20s) fell a couple of times onto small cams at the crux near the top of the pitch. On his next fall, two small cams (number 1 and 2 Metolius Ultralight Master Cams) pulled out of the crack. The next piece down, an 0.3 Camalot, stopped his fall, but he still hit the ground with rope stretch, suffering a fractured wrist and a separated shoulder. New Hampshire Fish and Game responded, as well as another pair of climbers who were on the scene, and the injured climber was carried out of the woods in a litter.

ANALYSIS

Though separate incidents, these three falls have some things in common: Each occurred when relatively small gear placements failed, and each involved experienced climbers. Even for knowledgeable trad climbers, protecting small cracks requires more patience and practice, and sometimes simply requires more gear. Building equalized nests of small pieces and "overprotecting" the start of climbs is often what it takes to keep a leader from hitting the ground.

The Barber Wall has been the scene of four ground falls since 2014. Three of these occurred because of gear placements failing. However, unlike the neighboring climb Double Vee, which has seen two ground falls in as many years, Nutcracker should be straightforward to protect.

It's notable that both the Nutcracker and Screaming Yellow Zonkers leaders broke their helmets in

their falls—it's likely the helmets prevented other serious injuries. Because of quick response by nearby climbers and rescue organizations, all three patients reached medical care with relative speed. Cell phones work in select spots off the Kancamagus and at other backcountry New Hampshire crags. However, carrying an inReach or similar satellite communication device and a light first-aid kit is not a bad idea for the more remote cliffs of the Northeast. (Source: Michael Wejchert, Mountain Rescue Service.)

Images

Article Details

Author	Micahel Wejchert
Publication	ANAM
Volume	11
Issue	71
Page	74
Copyright Date	2018
Article Type	Accident reports