



AAC Publications

Fatal Fall From Anchor – Miscommunication

Utah, Wasatch Range, Big Cottonwood Canyon

On July 13, Matt Hearn (26) was climbing High Fructose Corn Syrup, a long single-pitch 5.8 at the Slips, a popular Salt Lake beginner area. When Hearn reached the top of the route, his belayer and a few others on the ground thought they heard him call “off belay.” His belayer took him off, and shortly afterward Hearn fell approximately 115 feet to the ground, hitting his head on rocks at the base. Nearby climbers performed CPR, but Hearn died on the scene.

ANALYSIS

It would be somewhat surprising for the climber to go off belay at the top of this route because the anchor is equipped with fixed steel carabiners, so lowering is the norm and there is no need to untie and thread the anchor. It seems likely this was a case of miscommunication. This crag has many routes closely spaced to one another, and it's possible the belayer and others on the ground heard a nearby climber give an off-belay command. It's also possible Hearn miscommunicated his intent before climbing.

Always tell your belayer how you plan to descend a route before starting up it. Minimize extraneous conversation or commands at an anchor, and only say “off belay” if you are going off to rappel or belay your partner from above. When climbing in busy areas, be sure to use names with your commands—“Off belay, Jen!” rather than just “off belay”—so your partner knows that you specifically made a given command. (Source: The Editors.)

Images

Article Details

Author	The Editors
Publication	ANAM
Volume	11
Issue	71
Page	86
Copyright Date	2018
Article Type	Accident reports