



AAC Publications

Fall From Anchor – Inadequate Anchor

Arizona, Flagstaff Area, Oak Creek Overlook

On November 10, person 1 (female, 34) fell 40 to 60 feet from the top of the Oak Creek Vista overlook to the rocky trail below, suffering numerous serious injuries. An unaffiliated witness stated that he observed her climb to the top of the wall and then move the rope to another anchor to prepare a different line for climbing. The witness observed that this second anchor was a rope or cord that had been left in place around a boulder. He observed Person 1 rotate the cordage around the boulder and then thread the rappel rope into her descending device, and then fall as she lifted the attached device to clip it to her harness. The rope, belay device, and carabiner were located on the ground near Person 1, corroborating the witness' account.

Due to the difficult access to the accident site, a helicopter short-haul operation was conducted to transfer the patient to the parking lot above the climbs, where she was transferred to an air ambulance. She had a spinal injury, head trauma, collapsed lungs, and other internal injuries and fractures.

ANALYSIS

Although it wasn't possible to determine the exact cause of Person 1's fall, it seems likely that the cord around the boulder that formed the intended anchor either pulled up and over the boulder, broke, or came untied as Person 1 attempted to rig her rappel. Person 1 appeared not to have constructed the anchor, and it is unknown if she inspected the cordage adequately prior to using it. An adjacent juniper tree might have offered less risk of anchor failure compared to a sling around a smooth, rounded boulder. The climber also could have anchored temporarily to the tree for edge protection while she worked in the exposed space around the boulder anchor. (Source: Coconino County Search and Rescue.)

Images

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