



AAC Publications

Shawangunks Annual Summary

New York, Mohonk Preserve

In 2018 there were 23 reported climbing-related accidents. Injuries included five traumatic head injuries, one spinal fracture, several long-bone fractures, three open fractures of the lower legs, and minor ankle, wrist, shoulder, and hand injuries. Thirteen accidents required technical rescue, including six high-angle rescues. Two fatalities occurred after climbers fell a distance of greater than 60 feet to the ground.

Two climbers were injured when a top-rope anchor system failed on Herdy Gerdy (5.6) in the Trapps. One of the climbers fell around 20 feet to the ground, landing on another person sitting at the base. The climber suffered fractured vertebrae, and both suffered additional minor injuries. Upon inspection, Mohonk Preserve rangers found that the climber had set up the top-rope using hardware store webbing for the anchor system and clothesline as the belay rope.

While attempting to lead Nice 5.9 in the Trapps, a climber fell and suffered a traumatic brain injury. The climber had only placed two pieces of protection during the climb, the first about ten feet off the ground and the second at roughly 25 feet. The climber fell at the crux, and the higher piece failed to hold, resulting in an uncontrolled fall to the ground. The climber was wearing a hard-shell helmet.

A climber suffered kneecap, lower leg, and wrist fractures after a ground fall from the top of the “AMC Slab” in the Trapps. The climber was untethered to a safety system while cleaning the anchor site. Damp conditions at the time caused the rock to be slick.

A climber died after suffering multiple systems trauma in an uncontrolled fall of approximately 80 feet from Grand Traverse Ledge. The climber and their partner had just completed the first pitch of Arrow (5.8) in the Trapps and swapped gear on the GT Ledge. A decision was made to build a new anchor below the second pitch, which required a short walk across the ledge. Still tied in but not belayed, the climber lost their footing and fell off the ledge. The partner attempted to arrest the fall by grabbing the rope and sustained third-degree burns to the hands in the attempt.

Another fatal fall took place in the High Exposure area of the Trapps. The fall was not witnessed by climbers, so the exact climb being attempted and the cause are unknown. Inspection by Mohonk Preserve rangers found the climber wearing a harness with an ATC attached, along with a rope coiled and tied to the back. This suggests the climber intended to use the rappel stations nearby for descent upon completing a route. The absence of any additional gear suggested the climber had been free soloing.

In the Peters Kill area, a climber suffered a traumatic open fracture of the right ankle when an accident occurred during a top-rope lower. The climber had completed a 5.6 route on the Bunk Bed Wall and asked the belayer to lower him. The belayer fed rope out before ensuring the climber's weight was on the system. Upon leaning back, the climber fell about 15 feet before the belay held, resulting in an impact with a ledge. Once on scene, Mohonk Preserve rangers found the climber sitting on a small ledge about 40 feet up, still tied into the top-rope system. The belayer had disconnected the belay in an attempt to scramble up the cliff to provide aid. Rangers secured the patient to an anchor system, provided care, and executed a high-angle rescue.

A climber suffered a traumatic brain injury after a fall on Anguish (5.8) in the Trapps. Starting the third pitch, the climber fell approximately 20 feet before the belay caught and swung the climber into the cliff face. The climber was unresponsive while hanging below the belayer. The partner tied off the system and contacted emergency services. Once on the scene, rangers found the patient had regained consciousness but was unable to communicate. Rangers hauled the patient to Grand Traverse Ledge and then moved a short distance to the anchors on Three Pines (5.3) for lowering. The climber's foam helmet had broken in several places in the fall.

While leading the second pitch of Modern Times (5.8+) in the Trapps, a climber suffered injuries to the rib cage during a fall. The climber was approximately 20 feet diagonally up from the last piece of protection, resulting in a large pendulum swing into the cliff. Rangers stabilized the climber's injuries and lowered them from Grand Traverse Ledge to the ground.

ANALYSIS

Several accidents in 2018 likely would have had much worse outcomes if climbers were not wearing a helmet at the time they fell. Additionally, several accidents might have been avoided completely if climbers had been attached to a safety line or been on belay in exposed locations. In several accidents, additional protection could have mitigated the damage from falls when the last piece of protection failed to hold. (Source: Andrew Bajardi, Chief Ranger of the Mohonk Preserve.)

Images

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