



AAC Publications

Ground Fall – Inexperience, Inadequate Belay

North Carolina, Pilot Mountain State Park, The Parking Lot

Late in the afternoon on May 9, Dylan Pappas (21) fell to the ground while climbing Chicken Bone (5.8), a ten-bolt sport route. A member of his climbing party had led the climb before him and left the draws in place. The third bolt was clipped with a shortened sling (an “alpine draw”), with which Dylan had no experience. A witness stated that while attempting to clip this draw, about 25 feet up, it appeared Dylan was “fiddling with his sling and carabiner.” He accidentally removed the lower carabiner from the sling and then, when he attempted to reclip it, he did so incorrectly. When Dylan weighted the rope, the lower carabiner pulled free from the sling.

Dylan yelled “falling” and his belayer, Alex, initially was unsuccessful at arresting the fall, as he did not have control of the brake strand in his tube-style belay device. The belayer finally gained control, but Dylan impacted the ground in a partially seated position before hitting his head on the ground and losing consciousness. Dylan was wearing a helmet. After a night in the hospital for monitoring, he was released the next day with a bruised tailbone. (Sources: Pilot Mountain State Park rangers and Doug Lutz, Fox Mountain Guides.)

ANALYSIS

When used properly, extendable slings can reduce rope drag and minimize the chance of traditional protection pieces pulling out. In this case, the sling was configured properly but used incorrectly by Dylan. Additionally, the belay was inadequate. Had the belayer been paying closer attention, he may have had time to lock off the brake strand before the climber hit the ground. (Source: Aram Attarian.)

Images



A climber (unrelated to this incident) below Chicken Bone at Pilot Mountain, showing the bolt where another climber incorrectly clipped a quickdraw and then fell to the ground.

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