



## AAC Publications

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### **Lowering Error – Rope Too Short, No Stopper Knot**

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**My partner and I were climbing at the Buzzard Rocks crag, a series of slabs at the top of a ridge.** A hiking trail goes to the top and climbers have to either rappel or hike down a climber's trail to reach the base of the wall. As we were setting up to climb an adjacent route, we watched two climbers rappel Melungian Brotherhood (5.8). Person 1 (male, 17) rappelled using one doubled rope to an intermediate anchor, and then set up another rappel with a second rope to reach the base. We wondered why they hadn't just joined their ropes, but kept going about our business. Once they were both at the base and had retrieved their ropes, Person 2 (male, 17) prepared to lead the route. We assumed that he would be belaying from the top, since neither of their ropes had been long enough to reach the ground when doubled.

We went around the corner to our next route, and some time later heard a series of crashes as if someone had dropped a backpack off the side of the mountain. We went back around the corner to find Person 2 several feet downslope from the base trail, covered in blood, and Person 1 calling for help. I introduced myself as a WFR and began patient assessment while my partner headed for the trailhead to meet rescuers. Person 1 stayed on the phone with EMS.

Person 2 was wearing a helmet but had several head injuries, an ankle injury, and lots of abrasions. About an hour and a quarter after the fall, several sheriff's deputies arrived and took over the scene. Eventually a litter was brought, and about 30 people helped carry the litter out.

#### **ANALYSIS**

Person 1 said that he was lowering Person 2 and suddenly the rope flew through his hands. I have no doubt they ran out of rope and there was no stopper knot to close the system. They were using a 60-meter rope on a route that had required them to do two rappels. Both of them were relatively new climbers. Closing the system (e.g., a stopper knot or tying in the belayer's end of the rope) should be part of learning to belay, and should be checked before leaving the ground every time.

In hindsight, I wish we had not assumed they would belay from the top and had asked what they planned to do. In the future, my partner and I will probably be a bit more inquisitive around less experienced climbers. (Source: BR.)

## Images

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