



AAC Publications

Fatal Lead Fall on Rock – Inadequate Knot

Kentucky, Red River Gorge, Muir Valley, Midnight Surf Wall

On the afternoon of September 16, Marty Vogel (59) was working on Baby Face (5.12b) at Midnight Surf in the Muir Valley. For this route, the climber begins on a ledge approximately nine feet above the belayer. They were climbing in a group of three that day, and the belayer had just finished climbing another route when she came over to give Marty a catch. Marty was already on the ledge and tied in, with the route stick-clipped, so she didn't see him tie his knot. Before climbing, Marty indicated to his belayer that his knot was good and he was ready to climb. This was his third attempt on the route that day. The belayer reported that during Marty's ascent he clipped the permadraws on the route and adjusted the rope without any unusual tension or slack.

Marty fell at the eighth bolt of the route. The end of the rope pulled through the tie-in points on his harness and he fell approximately 130 feet, landing 50 feet below the belay station. According to the belayer, she did not feel the expected force from the fall before the rope went slack. The slack rope fell through most of the permadraws and did not have a knot at the end. Marty did not survive the fall.

Wolfe County Search and Rescue inspected the rope and the harness, finding them undamaged and in good condition. (Source: Wolfe County Search and Rescue.)

ANALYSIS

According to local climbers, Marty typically climbed with a single bowline with a Yosemite finish (a bowline with the rope's tail threaded back through the knot). Since the belayer was unfamiliar with this knot, she indicated that she was unable to check it on earlier climbs that day. It is most likely that Marty did not complete his knot or did not dress it properly—steps that are particularly important with this knot—allowing it to become untied.

Marty was a beloved member of the local community who regularly volunteered to build and maintain trails, developed new climbing routes, supported gear replacement efforts, and coached young climbers at a local recreation center. He will be missed by all who knew him. (Sources: Wolfe County Search and Rescue and local climbers.)

Images

Article Details

Author	Wolfe County Search and Rescue
Publication	ANAM
Volume	12
Issue	1
Page	71
Copyright Date	2020
Article Type	Accident reports