



AAC Publications

Rappel Error – Uneven Ropes, No Stopper Knots

Kentucky, Red River Gorge, Natural Bridge Region, Emerald City

On August 31, Jarek (27) and his partner were climbing Whiteout (5.8), a two- pitch trad route at Emerald City. After finishing the second pitch, Jarek set up a belay at the anchors, belayed his partner up, and then lowered her to the ground, where she untied and started packing up. He threaded the remaining rope through the anchors and threw it down. He had climbed this route about a month before, so he knew a doubled rope was long enough to make it to the ground. He remembers the rope getting caught on a ledge at the start of the second pitch, but did not pull the rope back up to reset it. His plan was to rappel to the ledge, secure himself to the first-pitch anchors while he made sure the rope reached the ground, and then finish the rappel.

Before Jarek reached the ledge, the end of the rope slipped through his rappel device and he fell approximately 50 feet, tumbling down the blocky portion at the start of the route. He lost consciousness. Wolfe County Search and Rescue responded to the incident and transported Jarek from the crag to an ambulance. He was treated for ankle, foot, wrist, rib, and scapula fractures and a partially collapsed lung. Jarek was not wearing a helmet. (Sources: Jarek and Wolfe County Search and Rescue.)

ANALYSIS

Jarek felt sure that both ends of the rope reached the ledge below the second pitch, so he expected to deal with rope management once he was at that point. Since he never made it to the ledge before the end of the rope fed through his device, he suspects the rope was creeping through the anchors as he rappelled, pulling the short end up. (This is more likely to occur when doing a rappel with two ropes of different diameters tied together.) This accident could have been avoided with stopper knots in the ends of the rope. In addition, with a slower descent, Jarek might have been able to identify the shorter strand before it fed through his device. (Source: Jarek.)

Images

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