



AAC Publications

Fall From Anchor – Lowering Error

Kentucky, Red River Gorge, Muir Valley, Bruise Brothers Wall

On November 8, Jason Miller (42) was cleaning the Offering, a 5.7 sport route at the Bruise Brothers Wall. After tethering to the anchors with slings, Jason threaded a bight of rope through the anchor system, tied a figure-eight on the bight, attached this to his harness with a locking carabiner, and untied his original knot, pulling the tail of the rope through the anchor system. Before detaching his slings from the anchor, Jason had his belayer take out the slack, and he weight-tested the system. It held, and Jason removed his slings. After indicating to his belayer that he was ready to be lowered, Jason felt a jolt and dropped approximately 60 feet to the ground. While falling, Jason remembers positioning his body to land on his side instead of his back.

Wolfe County Search and Rescue responded to the incident and transported Jason from the crag to an ambulance. He was ultimately airlifted to UK hospital in Lexington with a shattered and dislocated right ankle and wrist, a broken right elbow, a fractured pelvis, internal bleeding, and a partially collapsed lung.

According to other climbers in the area, after the fall, the locking carabiner was still attached to Jason's harness and the rope dropped to the ground without any knot in it. Jason was not wearing a helmet. (Sources: Jason Miller and Wolfe County Search and Rescue.)

ANALYSIS

While a definitive cause is unknown, it is possible that Jason did not clip the tied bight to his locking carabiner, but instead accidentally clipped another strand of rope within the knot. If this is done with an overhand or a figure-eight on a bight, the system may hold weight temporarily before failing. Consistent vigilance through the entire cleaning process is essential. Testing the knot with a bounce and watching it tighten before untethering from the anchor can further demonstrate that the knot is sufficient. (Sources: Jason Miller and climbers in the area.)

Images

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