



AAC Publications

Rappel Error – Uneven Ropes, Haste, No Stopper Knots

Wyoming, Yellowstone National Park, Mammoth Hot Springs, Hoodoos Area

My significant other/climbing partner and I (male, age 20) had spent most of August 6 sightseeing around Yellowstone. After seven hours of driving, I got antsy and checked Mountain Project to see if there were any climbs nearby. I found a 5.5 and 5.9 in the Hoodoos area, near Mammoth Hot Springs, that were easy to top-rope and had a short approach.

My partner and I scrambled up the backside of the crag to check it out. The anchor was odd, with a few chopped bolts, a single homemade bolt ten feet down the face, and a small dying tree. We scrambled down to the car and I racked up. Despite having a helmet, I consciously decided not to grab it because, after looking at the route, I thought, “Ya know, if I fall from the top while setting up this top-rope, a helmet isn’t going to help.” I climbed back up and constructed a monster anchor consisting of five cams and the trunk of the not-so-great tree. I think the rock is volcanic tuff, and it felt a bit soft, so I wanted as many pieces as I could get, even for a top-rope.

After the anchor was set up, I pulled out our 70-meter rope and dropped it onto the ledge at my feet. Two days prior to this trip, I had been on the Diamond in Colorado, and I was confident that we had center-coiled it before hiking off Longs Peak. It was pretty tangled, but I knew that Mountain Project had listed one of the routes as 25 feet in height, and even though this route obviously was taller than that, I assumed both sides of my rope would reach the ground.

I clipped a bight into the master point and tossed off the rope. I heard it hit and saw portions of it on the ground. The climb is vertical down low, which made it hard to see both strands running all the way to the ground. But I assumed both ends were down, since I believed I had grabbed the rope near the center. The route was so short that I failed to tie safety knots in the ends.

I clipped in my ATC, attached a klemheist backup, and, after weighting my system, unclipped my PAS and started backing off. I rappelled somewhere around 15 feet before stopping to admire an interesting horizontal slot I thought, “Wow, that’s going to be fun to use,” and then continued rappelling. Almost immediately, I went weightless and tipped backward, falling about 26 feet. I impacted the ground with the heel of my right foot before landing hard on my right wrist and hand. Blood gushed from my right wrist, and my right shoe was mostly ripped off, but I was alert and awake.

I yelled for my partner, and she ran to get a first-aid kit from the car as I held pressure on my wrist. She then did a quick, focused spine assessment before addressing my other injuries. After trying to close the laceration on my wrist with butter fly bandages, I moved to the car and we drove to the park medical clinic, luckily only ten minutes away. Unluckily, it had closed 45 minutes earlier. The nearest ER was 60 miles to the north in Livingston, Montana. An hour and 20 minutes later, we pulled up to the entrance. My injuries included a sprained ankle, a sprained right wrist, a lacerated right hand, abrasions covering large portions of my back, and contusions on my elbow, head, and right heel.

ANALYSIS

The most obvious way to prevent this accident would have been making sure the rope was placed into the anchor’s master point exactly at the middle. I also could have tied knots in the ends of the rope, I could have watched the rope carefully as I backed off the anchor to see if both strands were

going all the way to the ground, and I could have asked my partner, who was waiting around the corner in the shade, if both sides were on the ground. I also could have worn a helmet, which would have prevented one of my various injuries. Slowing down and paying more attention to detail would have prevented this accident. (Source: Anonymous.)

Images

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