



## Ground Fall – Inadequate Protection

Colorado, Boulder Canyon, Castle Rock

Molly Mitchell attempting Crank It with traditional protection. The four pieces that pulled out in her fall are marked. Photo by Tory Powers

**In the evening of October 1, professional climber Molly Mitchell (27) attempted a traditionally protected ascent of Crank It (5.13c/d, a.k.a. Slabio) at the base of Castle Rock.** The route is bolted, and she had climbed it previously using the bolts; now her goal was to lead the route while placing her own protection. The route has two separate cracks, one to the left down low, and then a crux section of face climbing to reach the next crack up and to the right. The climb follows this crack to the anchor around 40 feet up. Previously, in 2016, Brad Gobright fell from about 15 to 18 feet up while trying to lead this route on gear, and he ripped the one piece he had placed and decked. He broke his back and ankle.

Molly got through the crux and fell after her foot slipped about 25 to 30 feet up. The fall ripped out four of the pieces of gear she placed, and she decked. (The gear that pulled out of the crack—from top to bottom—included a small RP nut, a purple Totem Cam, a small offset nut, and a medium-size nut.) Fortunately, she landed on a bouldering pad that she and her partner had laid out for the lower section, just in case. Nonetheless, she ended up with compression fractures in her L2 and L3 vertebrae. No surgery was needed because nothing was displaced, but she had to wear a back brace for nine weeks.

### ANALYSIS

After thinking about this a lot and watching the video of the attempt (which will eventually be released), I believe that even though I had tested some of the pieces of gear before, by falling onto the gear with the bolts clipped as backup, the rope was running in a different spot during my trad attempt. The pro was in two separate cracks and the rope was not in a straight line. So that was one factor.

Also, the crack is very polished, shallow, and flaring. The pieces are incredibly specific, and sometimes even when they look OK, they will not hold a dynamic fall. The bottom piece that pulled out (the medium nut) was a solid piece of gear, but what happened—and what you will eventually see in the video—is the tension in the rope from ripping the upper pieces actually lifted this nut up and out of the crack. Had that nut held, I would not have hit the ground.

I want to emphasize that my belayer, Tanner, did an absolutely amazing job at trying to take in slack and move backward. There was nothing more he could have done to help the situation. It was a bad fall, and I take full responsibility for putting myself in that position.

I believed I had taken my time while rehearsing for this attempt and tried to figure out the gear. I had had a near-decking incident at the same spot a week prior, on gear that I had tested yet still ripped, and this made me fully reanalyze my gear for that section. I thought it was better, but obviously I did not account for the rope position, the nut lifting out, and the fact that if you don't place those pieces perfectly on the go, they will not hold - slippery, cryptic granite! I think potentially a double rope system, anchoring down the lower nut so it wouldn't get pulled out, and making sure to really place each piece perfectly would have helped.

During my attempt, I was way more pumped than I had been while rehearsing the middle section. I felt like I was not going to send, but didn't want to give up. My foot slipped on the next sequence. I definitely would have been better off clipping a bolt and calling it a day. But this is the fine line you walk in this territory of climbing—do you go for it or do you bail? Had I known the gear would rip, obviously I would have bailed. But hindsight is 20/20. (Source: Molly Mitchell.)

## Images



Molly Mitchell attempting Crank It with traditional protection. The four pieces that pulled out in her fall are marked. The lowest of these was a good nut, but the action of the rope during the fall apparently levered it out.

## Article Details

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