



AAC Publications

Ground Fall — Protection Pulled Out

Colorado, Boulder Canyon, Bell Buttress

On August 13, after climbing a few routes at Bell Buttress, I decided to give a redpoint attempt at Arms Bazaar (5.12a trad). I had spent two previous sessions on the route: one in August 2019 and one the previous week. I had the route fairly dialed and felt confident I could send it that day.

I racked all my gear in the order I intended to place it and began climbing. After clipping the lone bolt on the route, I did a few balancey moves to a good stance. From here, I placed a red Metolius cam in a horizontal crack with the stem facing downward. I clipped into this with a shoulder-length sling. This is a shallow crack, with the head of the cam just fitting in; the fit was tight and the lobes all had great contact, though, so I was not worried about the placement.

After a rest, I did a short traverse into the crux. From an undercling, I placed a black Metolius cam (approximately 1.25 inches) in the crack above me. Although the crack flares slightly, the black Metolius fits here decently well, and I had fallen on it multiple times. After placing this cam, I began the crux sequence. I fell with my waist at about the height of the top cam. Both of the cams I placed blew out, and I hit the ground from an estimated 25 feet high. I believe the bolt may have begun to catch me slightly as I hit the ground, although I am not sure.

My left side took pretty much all of the damage. About 20 to 30 seconds after the fall, I began to evaluate my condition with my partner. We confirmed that I was not bleeding or deformed anywhere (especially on my skull), so I sat down and just began to think and chat with my partner in order to determine my mental state, which was normal, considering the circumstances. I ended up with a bruised left hip, bruised left heel, and a sore thumb. The foam on the right side of my helmet was completely cracked. I likely had a mild concussion, but I did not show any symptoms besides slight confusion for a minute or so after I fell.

ANALYSIS

First of all, I consider myself extremely lucky to have walked away from this fall with such minimal damage. If circumstances were just slightly different, my injuries would have been much more severe.

The protection pulling out was very surprising. I had fallen on the same black Metolius placement multiple times, during both prior attempts, and I also considered the red Metolius to be solid, albeit not perfect. The only explanation I can come up with is that the two pieces interacted with each other and the rope in such a way that they helped to torque each other out. The red Metolius was clipped with a shoulder-length sling, and this directed the rope at an estimated 45° angle down and left of the black Metolius placement.

It is worth noting that there is another possible placement (0.4 size) about eight inches under the black Metolius. I had placed a yellow Totem Cam here on some previous burns, but ultimately determined it was unnecessary. Had I placed this piece before I fell, I likely would not have decked. (I did take a few falls earlier onto the black Metolius without the yellow Totem Cam placed, so the Totem was not a necessity in preventing a funky interaction between the two Metolius cams.) Although the interaction between pieces when loaded can be difficult to predict, it's something trad climbers should give a lot of thought to, especially when redpointing, where one has time on the

ground or while hangdogging to really analyze each placement and the system of protection as a whole.

Had I not been wearing a helmet, I believe I could have been very seriously injured. When trad climbing, everything gets harder to predict and control for, and the helmet is such an easy precaution to take. (Source: Joel May, adapted from a post at Mountain Project, with permission.)

Images

Article Details

Author	Joel May
Publication	ANAM
Volume	12
Issue	74
Page	
Copyright Date	2021
Article Type	Accident reports