



AAC Publications

Various Leader Falls With Injuries

Kentucky, Red River Gorge

On October 13, a climber swung into the wall after taking a lead fall on Air-Ride Equipped (5.11a sport) at Solarium in Muir Valley, resulting in a broken and dislocated ankle.

On October 16, an experienced female climber fell off Push Present (5.11d sport) at the Infirmary in Miller Fork. She had veered left of the bolt line, because she thought she was in the fall zone of a climber on the crux of the adjacent route (the routes share a start). Instead of climbing back down and right to get in sequence on the route, she took an unannounced fall. She swung into the wall hard, resulting in a pilon fracture.

On November 28, a female climber with over five years of experience took a controlled lead fall on The King Lives On (5.10b sport) at the Gallery in the PMRP. She hit the wall with her leg extended, resulting in a pilon fracture.

On November 30, a female climber was climbing Omaha Beach (5.14a sport) at the Motherlode. Her foot slipped, causing her leg to go behind the rope. While correcting her leg position during the fall, she inverted. Although the route is overhanging, she impacted the wall, injuring her sacrum. (Sources: Erik Kloecker, Wolfe County Search and Rescue, eyewitness, Mountain Project, and anonymous climber.)

ANALYSIS

Some of these injuries may have resulted from poor or unlucky positioning by the climber or inadequate awareness while falling or preparation to absorb the impact. Others might have been avoided with a softer catch by the belayer.

The arrest of a leader fall is a dynamic situation. Before the leader leaves the ground, the climber and belayer need to consider and discuss their weight difference, the properties of the rope (stretch/elongation), and any potential hazards of a fall on that route. During the climb, a skilled belayer will adjust the amount of slack in the system, their position, and their planned reaction to a fall to give an appropriate catch. (See “Dynamic Belaying” on next page.) The falling climber should be actively spotting their landing and preparing to absorb the impact of the fall with their legs.

Falling is part of climbing, and good partners practice their falling and belaying, just like other climbing skills. Consider practice falls at the gym or at a safe location outside, starting with falls at or below a bolt and gradually taking longer falls (when high enough on a route to be safe). This is a great time for partners to discuss their personal preferences, gauge the effects of weight differences, learn the characteristics of the climbing rope, learn how belay adjustments affect the catch, and discuss situations where a softer or tighter belay would be more appropriate. (Source: The Editors.)

Images

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