



## AAC Publications

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### Ground Fall — Excess Slack, Fatigue, Missed Clip

North Carolina, Melrose Mountain Climbing Park

**Melrose Mountain is a relatively new climbing area, near the South Carolina border, that hosts top-rope, trad, mixed, and sport routes (5.7–5.11). On December 19, Jesse Watson (32) and his partner EC (31) were finishing their day by climbing Feelin' Good (5.10a), a 50-foot, five-bolt sport route.**

Jesse was leading and had clipped the first three bolts on the route without difficulty. At the fourth bolt, he struggled to clip and kept dropping the rope. At this point, he knew he “was going to fall” and noted that he was high enough on the route that a ground fall was not expected to be an issue. He lost his grip and fell approximately 30 to 35 feet to the ground. He was not wearing a helmet.

His belayer, using a Grigri Plus, had given him slack to make the clip and was unable to pull in the slack and arrest his fall before he impacted the large boulder beneath the climb, hitting feet first. (The rope didn't catch him until he came to rest in a seated position.) A paramedic, Jesse did a quick self-assessment and found an open fracture of his left tibia/fibula and a suspected fractured right ankle.

#### ANALYSIS

Jesse described what he had learned from this incident: “I think what it ultimately came down to was complacency. I am very comfortable leading 5.10 sport, and my partner and I had become too comfortable with the fact that I don't fall. I usually climb pretty fast, so I had requested extra slack from my belayer so as to not get hung up. The additional slack for the clip, the distance my belayer was standing from the face due to the boulder below the route, and fatigue were all factors in this accident. I was not wearing a helmet and was extremely lucky to ‘walk away’ with the injuries I did.” When belayers position themselves anywhere but directly under the climb, it's not just the climber at risk—the belayer can be pulled into the wall by the forces of a fall, causing serious injuries. When the topography forces you to belay more than a few feet away from an ideal position, consider a ground anchor. (Sources: Jesse Watson and the Editors.)

**ANOTHER GROUND FALL AT MELROSE:** In August, a climber experienced a ground fall on a route next to Feelin' Good. He did the first few moves of Something to BRAG About (5.11- trad) and placed a medium cam in an undercling. Deciding he couldn't make the next moves, he asked to rest on the cam, but as soon as he weighted it, the bottom of the flake snapped off and he fell to the ground. “Luckily my belayer spotted me and kept my body from landing weird,” he said. “I had just a scrape on my arm.” The climber said he failed to notice a small crack in the rock near his placement, and that he now plans to climb only sport routes at this crag because of the rock quality. (Source: Anonymous climber.)

## Images



Area of the flake that broke during a fall at Melrose Mountain, causing a cam to rip out.



The cam and a piece of the flake that broke during a fall at Melrose Mountain.

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