



## AAC Publications

---

### Ground Fall – Cam Pulled Our

West Virginia, Cooper's Rock State Forest, Roof Rocks

**On October 4, I (Mike Paugh, 38) and Sarah Smith were searching for areas at Cooper's Rock to bring clients with my new guide service, Ascension Climbing Guides.** We were also climbing routes in the area. At about 2 p.m., I racked up to attempt Upchouca (5.12a/b), which begins with an unprotected V5 start. I knew the route was in my wheelhouse of climbing fitness but also at the peak of my climbing limits. I felt confident about the send. I rehearsed the opening moves 10 to 12 times, trying to find my sequence to the hero jug about 15 feet up.

I set off one last time, committing to the boulder problem and fully aware there was a point of no return where I could not jump off without getting injured. I felt gassed and pumped immediately after making it through the crux, probably from the numerous attempts to figure out my sequence. Unfortunately, the placement I had spotted from the ground for my first piece of protection turned out to be complete garbage.

Feeling pumped and realizing that I was in trouble, I continued upward and found an excellent horizontal seam. I placed a yellow Metolius TCU up to the trigger, with all three lobes fully engaged, and clipped it using an alpine draw. Breathing a sigh of relief, I asked my belayer, Sarah, to take me. The cam held and I proceeded to shake out my arms. The climbing above looked to ease up significantly, and I identified a couple of solid gear placements.

As soon as I shifted my body weight to the left and prepared to continue up the route, the TCU blew from the rock with the sound of a 12-gauge shotgun. When it popped, a piece of rock hit me in the face as I began to fall. Everything sped up, and the next thing I remember is hitting the ground and screaming in pain. I suffered an open fracture of my left tibia and fibula. Thankfully, there was a party of four climbers nearby who responded to Sarah's call for help until EMS arrived.

### ANALYSIS

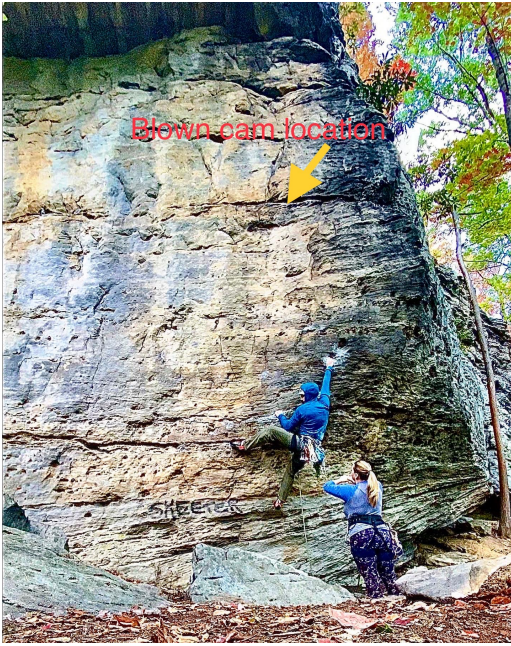
I had three surgeries to repair the damage and later remove the external fixation device attached to my leg. I've been doing great with my recovery, and I've started climbing again.

Given the hard, bouldery crux in the first 15 to 18 feet of this route and the rocky landing below it, I should have placed bouldering pads at the base of the climb, treating it like a highball boulder problem. Protecting the landing zone should have been priority number one, especially for a ground-up, on-sight attempt. Once I reached the jug hold past the crux, I was in a no-return, no-fall zone, especially without any pad protection.

I've also realized I should have considered setting up a top-rope to rehearse the route, due to its PG-13 rating and not being able to assess gear placements adequately from the ground. Had I done so, I could have safely assessed the rock quality (which was a little chossy in the crack) and the protection before leading. I also could have backed up that single TCU with another placement before asking Sarah to take my weight.

I am extremely grateful to the group of young climbers who kept me calm and called 911 and to everyone who helped get me out of there and care for my injuries. (Source: Mike Paugh.)

## Images



Mike Paugh had set up a video camera to record what he hoped would be an onsight of a 5.12 route at Cooper's Rock. The site of the cam that pulled out is marked.

## Article Details

|                |                  |
|----------------|------------------|
| Author         | Mike Paugh       |
| Publication    | ANAM             |
| Volume         | 12               |
| Issue          | 74               |
| Page           |                  |
| Copyright Date | 2021             |
| Article Type   | Accident reports |