



AAC Publications

Leader Fall – Single Piece Pulled Out

Colorado, Eldorado Canyon State Park, Wind Tower

My partner Mike (46) and I, Tiffany Hauck (50), convened on the morning of June 13. Our sights were set on Wind Ridge (4 pitches, 5.7). We had climbed on the route a month earlier but ended up missing a good portion of the ridge. We wanted to bag the full climb.

We made good progress and were soon at the top of the second pitch, nested in a cave-like hollow. Mike had led the previous pitch and opted to wrap the rope around a single largish boulder as the only anchor in the belay. I'd led the next pitch previously and knew that once I maneuvered past the chin-up, it was gravy.

I tightened my helmet and stepped onto a nearby boulder, so I could stretch and reach a large flake, which overhangs about eight feet above the belay. I heaved myself up into a narrow hollow. I put a cam in the same crack I'd previously used and then yanked in four directions. Satisfied the cam was stable and wouldn't walk, I clipped in, stood up, assessed my position, and made a step onto a tiny foothold—and I slipped. My right side slammed onto a large boulder at the edge of the belay ledge and I bounced—how far out, I don't know, as I lost sense of direction. [As Hauck fell, the sole cam she had placed as protection pulled out.] My ears filled with the sound of pro slamming into the rock and striking my helmet. I was yanked back toward the rock, then bounced briefly again before I came to a stop. [Hauck and her partner estimated the fall was around 30 feet, ending well below the belay ledge.]

It took time, but I righted myself and looked up to see Mike leaning over the boulder I'd hit on the way down. The first thing I noticed was a large splatter of blood on the rock between us, but Mike quickly explained that it was his blood—he had been pulled violently across the rock when I fell. I painfully climbed back to the belay ledge, and eventually we scrambled over to the descent trail. With the help of Mike and a climber named Hillary, who had come up the route behind us, I was able to walk out under my own power.

A visit to the emergency room revealed no concussion and no broken bones. I had minor scrapes and bruises on my shins, and contusions on my hip and buttocks. That evening, my left shin swelled to twice its normal size. The contusion would take weeks to heal.

ANALYSIS

It is hard to say for sure the cause of the cam failing. I don't know if it's because I put in the wrong sized cam or if I put it in a bad location. But the most likely cause is that I placed too small of a cam, or that I placed it in a flaring crack. (Source: Tiffany Hauck.)

Editor's Note: The cracks available at the crux are flared and piton-scarred, making cam placements tricky. A fall here is often a ledge fall. One can easily walk off from here by traversing the big ledge.

Images



Wind Ridge climbs directly to the circled belay ledge atop pitch two. From here, climbers can either escape left or continue through an overhang, the site of two falls reported in ANAC 2022. In August, two climbers fell all the way to the point marked X, one of them dying from his injuries.



The awkward overhanging at the start of the third pitch of Wind Ridge.

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