



## AAC Publications

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### Fall on Rock

Kentucky, Red River Gorge, Bald Rock Recreational Preserve

**On December 4, a climber (male, 26) fell above the last piece of gear he had placed on Charlie (5.13b, single-pitch trad) at Chocolate Factory.** The route follows a crack in a dihedral. The climber fell while making a dynamic move on the face of the overhanging right wall. He took a long freefall that was arrested abruptly, hitting the left (vertical) face hard and resulting in a severe open fracture of the left tibia and fibula. The placed gear held.

The climber had been working this route for a couple of weeks. He took a similar fall while making the same move the day before with a different belayer. The fall that resulted in the injury was described as significantly longer than the previous fall and finished with an abrupt pendulum into the wall. The climber also felt like he came off the wall angled to the left. Both the climber and belayer have many years of experience.

### ANALYSIS

Climber positioning during the fall likely contributed to the injury. It also appears the belayer may have had more slack in the system than appropriate and did not “move into” the fall enough when the rope tightened (to soften the arrest). With very steep climbs, common in the Southeast, some belayers can get in the habit of leaving out excessive slack, since a falling climber is unlikely to impact the wall with enough force to cause injury. While most of the climbing on Charlie is along the steeper right side of the dihedral, the belayer needs to consider that the climber may swing into the vertical left face during a fall and should soften the arrest appropriately.

It is a common misconception that extra slack equates to a soft catch. The slack lengthens a fall, but it is the belayer’s movement into the fall as the rope tightens that softens the arrest. Learn more about dynamic belaying in the Essentials article “Dynamic Belaying: The Art of the Soft Catch” in the 2021 Accidents. (Sources: The climber and the Editors.)

**Images**

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