



## AAC Publications

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### **Falling Rock — Severed Rope**

New York, Shawangunks, The Trapps

**On April 18, Gabe Schwartz (39) and Kile Simpson (33) were climbing Wrist, a two-pitch 5.6 in the Trapps area.** Simpson, a climber with four years of experience, was leading the first pitch. Schwartz, who had been climbing for over ten years, wrote, “He (Kile) was nearing the top of the first pitch when he let out a yell.” Schwartz assumed a fall had taken place. He “...took a step back to prepare for a big catch and looked up to see a large rock falling down the wall.”

The rock landed at the bottom of the cliff and obliterated a dead tree before joining a scree field. At this point, Schwartz saw the lead rope lying limp on the ground. It had been severed about 40 feet below Simpson.

Schwartz recounts, “Once I notified him of the situation, he placed two cams and anchored off of them. He was at a hands-free stance. I happened to have my [own] rope with me, so I had a climber in the area belay me as I led up to the top of the first pitch. I set an anchor and tossed my partner the end of the rope so that he could tie in [and climb to my stance]. We finished the second pitch and retrieved all of our gear as we rappelled. We found the rock after the fact and estimated it to be 80 to 90 pounds.

### **ANALYSIS**

Simpson wrote, “I was on an obvious line, but apparently off route. The rock that sheared seemed stable. I used it as a handhold. The rock sheared when I moved up after placing a cam. I then went direct into the cam. Having four points of contact and a large ledge was why I did not fall. I was not aware of the loose rock until after the incident.” He was 100 feet up when the rope was severed, and he was fortunate that the weight of the block impacting his rope did not pull him off.

This accident resulted in a combination of the leader taking a less frequented line and possibly the presence of loose rock in the early spring due to the freeze/thaw cycle. Simpson was wearing a helmet. Schwartz cannot recall if he had his helmet on while belaying, but his rule was to wear a helmet 100 percent of the time while climbing and perhaps 50 percent of the time on the ground. Now, he always wears a helmet while belaying. (Source: Gabe Schwartz.)

## Images



The severed rope.



Kile Simpson holding the rock that cut his rope while he was leading.

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