



AAC Publications

Fatal Fall From Anchor – Inexperience at Cleaning

North Carolina, Pilot Mountain State Park, Parking lot Area

During the late afternoon on August 23, Miriam Cho (30) and her partner were climbing the route Chicken Bone (5.6), located in the Parking Lot climbing area of Pilot Mountain State Park. Miriam led the climb and reached the anchors, where she began the task of cleaning the gear in preparation for lowering.

This was the first time Miriam had attempted to complete this transition, and her partner stated that he had coached her on the ground on how to clean an anchor safely. He noted that Miriam spent more time at the top anchors than a more experienced climber would have. She pulled up on the rope multiple times to take her weight off the rope or her personal anchor system (PAS). When she sat back as if ready to lower, she fell approximately 90 feet to the ground, her rope falling with her.

She received multiple fractures and other injuries in the fall. First responders stated she was breathing but not responsive. Her helmet was removed to check her pulse, and she was left in the position where she landed until she stopped breathing. At this point she was repositioned and CPR was started. Once paramedics arrived, they determined there was no heart activity and stopped CPR. (Source: Ranger Nicholas Bowman.)

ANALYSIS

It is believed Miriam used a PAS to tether herself to the anchors. She was found with a figure-of-eight on a bight attached to her belay loop with a locking carabiner and had untied from her figure eight follow-through tie-in knot. This suggests she intended to push a bight of the rope through the anchor and then tie a figure eight in the bight to clip to her belay loop. However, she apparently failed to pass the bight of rope through the rings first.

There are a few steps climbers can take to avoid a repeat of this tragic event. First, there should be clear communication between climber and belayer as to what's going to happen at the anchor before the climber leaves the ground. Second, new climbers can practice threading and cleaning a mock anchor on the ground before doing it at the top of a route. Once the climber is at the anchor, if communication is clear, the experienced belayer should verbally talk the climber through the steps of cleaning the anchor, or the climber can verbalize each step to the belayer for confirmation. And finally, once threaded through the anchor, the climber should make sure they are still on belay before committing to the rope. Have the belayer take the rope tight to confirm the system is working before unclipping the PAS or other tether from the anchor. (Source: The Editors.)

Images

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