



## AAC Publications

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### **RAPPEL FATALITY – Broken Sling**

California, Joshua Tree National Park, Sheep Pass Area

**On March 26, Tina Fiori (51) fell approximately 60 to 80 feet to the ground from a sport route called Turkey Terror (5.9) on the Wailing Sax Wall.**

Matt Himmelstein (55) was climbing with Fiori and one other climber. He later reported on Facebook and Mountainproject.com that the group had climbed the route on top-rope, using their own anchor arrangement attached to the two-bolt anchor. There also were fixed webbing slings of an unknown age attached to the anchor bolts. At end of the day, Fiori clipped into the fixed slings and then removed the top-rope anchor arrangement. When she weighted the old slings, they broke and she fell.

Himmelstein noted that pieces of the old sling fell to the ground with the rope, which was threaded through Fiori's ATC rappel device. Following Fiori's fall, Himmelstein summoned help while the other climber stayed with Fiori. First responders reported that she died at the scene.

### **ANALYSIS**

This was one of two fatal accidents in Southern California involving weathered webbing this year (see report here). There was also a near fatality in the Wind River Range from an old sling anchor. Leaving webbing through fixed anchors—whether pitons, nuts, or, in this case, bolts—was a common practice in the past. It is still frequently done in remote areas. On Mountainproject.com, "plantmandan" wrote, "(The Wailing Sax Wall) is not commonly climbed.... That crag has been mostly abandoned since the FAs were established. The anchor, whatever the contents, was probably old and rarely used."

Many climbers do not carry spare slings, and new climbers might not be aware of the need to replace or back up webbing. The old rule regarding fixed slings is, "Two slings equals one anchor." But even in that scenario, two very old pieces of fixed webbing might not be adequate. Himmelstein said, "The desert is not is not kind to nylon.... It doesn't take a whole lot of time sitting in the sun baking and also getting rained on and being frozen."

Fiori was extremely experienced, but for whatever reason, she chose to set up her rappel in the manner that she did. Even the wise among us should remember that it is prudent to carry spare webbing or a cordelette to back up old slings. (Sources: Matt Himmelstein and Mountainproject.com.)

**Images**

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