



AAC Publications

GROUND FALL — Rappel Error

Colorado, Eldorado Canyon State Park, Wind Tower

On June 22, a female climber (58) was rappelling to the ground from a bolted anchor on a route called The Bomb (2 pitches, 5.4) when she fell an estimated 40 feet to the ground. She suffered life-threatening injuries. Bystanders called 911 immediately and rendered aid to the injured climber.

Climber Matt Neidenberg was one of the first responders. He wrote on Mountainproject.com that, "My partner and I were racking up today to climb Tagger (about 40' uphill) when the accident occurred. They (the female climber and partner) were rappelling down The Bomb anchors. (My partner and I) and two other climbers were first on scene. I called 911. Fortunately, one of the other climbers was an EMT. He was able to keep her stable until emergency services and Rocky Mountain Rescue showed up."

After SAR arrived, the climber was transported to a waiting helicopter by ambulance. Unfortunately, she passed away seven months later due to complications from the accident.

ANALYSIS

On rappels, centering the rope, using an autoblock, and tying knots in the rope ends are prudent precautions. The rappel anchor in question was the second of two sets of bolted stations used for descending from several routes on Wind Tower. The Bomb is popular with beginning trad leaders, though the female climber who suffered the accident was an expert climber.

In correspondence with ANAC, Neidenberg wrote, "It's a relatively easy climb, and I would guess they actually climbed a different route but used those anchors for the descent. One strand of the rope was still in her rappel device. The other was not. The rope had pulled through the anchor and was collected on a ledge above. The fallen climber's partner was still up at the rappel station."

We cannot be certain, but the team was probably using a single 60- or 70-meter rope. The anchor consists of two bolts, vertically oriented, and joined with chain connected to a steel ring. The anchor itself is at a stance that in turn is below a large incut shelf. It is convenient to stack the rope on the shelf, and this might have confused the process of threading the rope evenly. Neidenberg wrote, "As she was very experienced, I can only guess both strands were in her device when she started rappelling. I can also only guess that the rope was not centered and/or there was no knot in the end of the rope. But I don't want to assume anything." (Sources: Matt Neidenberg and Bouldercounty.gov.)

Images

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