



AAC Publications

FALL ON ROCK — Protection Pulled Out

Colorado, Eldorado Canyon State Park, Redgarden Wall

On April 2, “Andrew” (31) and “Jordan” (28) were climbing a link-up of several difficult routes, as training for an upcoming trip to Patagonia. Andrew fell while climbing the third pitch of the day.

Andrew wrote to ANAC, “I led the first pitch of The Wisdom (5.10d), and Jordan led the next pitch, which was the 12b crux of Scary Canary. I racked up for the third, a pitch called Rosy Toit (5.10b, PG-13) that would connect us with Plastic Jesus (5.11c, PG-13). The gear on Rosy Toit started out good. A few great cam placements led to a fixed pin. Twelve feet past the pin, I found a shallow number 2 Camalot placement in a pod. About eight feet beyond were two or three worthless-looking pins in poor quality, flaky rock. The route description states that after climbing up to a small roof, you traverse left on run-out face climbing.

“I decided not to clip the apparently worthless pin. Instead, I buried a red C3 behind a thin flake and extended it with a single-length runner. It was the best piece I could find. I was confident in the number 2 Camalot, so even if the red C3 pulled, I would take a clean fall onto a good piece. Feeling sound, I began traversing left. The footholds were undercut with hands above the shallow roof. Then I suddenly was in the air. Why I fell is unknown. It is possible that a foothold broke or my foot slipped.

“The red C3 held some of the force and then popped. I didn’t become alarmed until the number 2 Camalot ripped. It held some of the force, jerked me a little, and then pulled. I kept falling and hit a ledge at the same level as my belayer. The ledge shattered my right ankle, but was narrow enough to allow me to continue to fall, rather than slamming my body and causing severe injury.

“After impacting the ledge, I fell past my belayer before I was caught by the fixed pin. I had fallen 40 feet total. I could feel my foot and ankle flopping around like a rubber chicken. My ankle was severely angulated, and my fibula had burst through my skin. Blood was splattered on the rock, running out of my leg. I let out a scream of rage with the realization that I would not be going to Patagonia anytime soon. I started crawl-climbing my way up to my belayer, while he yarded on the rope.

“After taking some pain medication from our first-aid kit, I yelled to climbers on the ground that I was bleeding and had broken my ankle. I told them to call 911 and confirm with us once they had gotten ahold of emergency services. I knew that if we fixed one end of our 70-meter rope to the anchor, we could rappel from the top of the second pitch directly to the ground on a single strand. The free end of our rope easily reached the ground. I chose to rappel with a Grigri so that, if I lost consciousness, the locking feature would prevent me from falling. I went down first because I was still bleeding and assumed the pain was only going to get worse as adrenaline wore off.

“A group of four climbers helped me onto flat ground and did what they could to get me in a comfortable position. Within an hour of the accident, EMS arrived, put me in a litter, and carried me to an ambulance. Twelve months later, I am unable to run or jump, but I continue to see progress as I regain strength and the pain I experience while walking or biking continues to reduce.”

ANALYSIS

Andrew wrote, "I think the accident was bad luck and tactical oversight. There were two mistakes that I made that might have prevented this accident. First, I should have clipped at least one of the questionable pins near the marginal red C3. When climbing and attempting to place protection in poor quality rock, one can find safety in numbers. Though my stance wasn't good enough allow me to equalize, I could have clipped both pieces independently. Don't skip clipping a piece. I wouldn't have been any worse off if one of the pins had also pulled out, but I may have avoided injury if it had been clipped and held.

"Second, I should have extended the number 2 Camalot [with a sling or quickdraw]. There was a significant gouge in one of the cam lobes and a covering of fine rock powder. This indicates that as the rope went taut as I fell onto the red C3, the rope pulled the stem of the number 2 up and out, so it was no longer pointed in the direction of pull. This may have caused the cam to walk out slightly, and as it began to catch, the stem was pulled back downward. Since it was in a shallow pod, this may have caused it to walk and break free. A runner could have prevented that." (Sources: Andrew and Jordan.)

Images



Rocky Mountain Rescue Group carries "Andrew" out of Eldorado Canyon after his plummet off Rosy Toit on the Redgarden Wall.

Article Details

Author	Andrew and Jordan
Publication	ANAM
Volume	13
Issue	76
Page	50
Copyright Date	2023
Article Type	Accident reports