



AAC Publications

GROUND FALL — Lowering Error

Colorado, Staunton State Park

On September 17, Climber 1 (female, 28) was being lowered by Climber 2 (male, 27) when she was dropped at least four or five feet to the ground.

Climber 1 wrote, “We weren’t sure if our rope would be long enough, so my buddy climbed first while I kept an eye on the rope, watching for the midpoint. It turned out we had just enough rope to make it and be lowered safely, if the belayer stayed near the wall (to maximize the rope length). By the third climb, I guess we had forgotten about the shorter rope, because my belayer did not tie off the end of the rope and he forgot to move closer to the wall when he was lowering me.

“I did the climb cleanly and easily and was ready to be lowered. My ‘friend’ started lowering me (I remember he was lowering me much faster than normal). As I got closer to the ground, I remembered that our rope was short, and just as I looked over my shoulder, I saw my belayer standing way too far back (15’ away from the wall!). It was too late. I picked up even more speed as the rope went through his belay device, and I landed on my back directly on a large rock beneath me. It fractured my sacrum. Since I was already being lowered pretty fast, it’s hard to tell, but I think I dropped at least four or five feet to the ground.”

ANALYSIS

Many sport routes require 70- or 80-meter (or longer) ropes. Longer pitches are becoming the new normal as climbers extend existing climbs or establish longer routes. Be aware of route length and the length of one’s rope. In the latter case, rope lengths (and route length estimations) can vary. Climber 1 did the prudent thing by watching the center mark to determine pitch length and establish safe belayer positioning. Unfortunately, Climber 2 forgot or neglected to adhere to safe practices.

Climber 1 wrote, “Tying off the end of the rope [by tying in the belayer or tying a stopper knot] would have prevented this accident, because then the rope couldn’t have passed completely through the Grigri. Also, if my belayer had remembered to stand close to the wall when lowering, I may have had a softer landing. He’d probably say the same. Luckily there was a girl nearby with Tylenol and ibuprofen that I was able to take right away.” (Source: Climber 1 and the Editors.)

Images

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