



AAC Publications

LEADER FALL – Protection Pulled Out

North Carolina, Pisgah National Forest, Looking Glass Rock, Sun Wall

On Tuesday, June 26, my partner, Graham P., and I got an early start on The Odyssey (5 pitches, 5.11-). I started the first pitch and eventually pulled on a piece of gear through the lower crux. I passed a feature called the Sharks Fin, which is the recommended belay for the first pitch. I placed a blue C4 in a bottleneck, looked up at the next 25 feet of crack, and realized that this was the only gear that would fit.

I began bumping the blue C4 up the crack. I would place my foot and hand and reach down, remove the cam, then place it as high as I could. I repeated this process until the crack began to flare. Then I found a decent rest with my back pressed into the rock.

I placed the blue C4 high and fully extended it with an alpine draw. Just below the cam I placed a nut in a bottleneck with one side being solid and the other debris. I would not have trusted my life to this nut alone. There was probably no reason to place this nut; it got me more pumped and created more hesitation.

Above this, I climbed 15 or 20 feet as the crack became more flaring. At this point I was pumped. I placed an under-cammed gray C4 in the back of the flare and broke out right onto the slab, where I found an eyebrow that took an under-cammed blue Metolius. I was 140 to 170 feet above Graham. I climbed two body lengths above the blue Metolius and could see the anchor bolts approximately 10 feet to my right and a body length or two higher. I felt insecure on the slab and decided to downclimb to the blue Metolius. While retracing the moves, I slipped, fell, and felt the cam go tight and pop. The gray C4 also blew. I remember falling quite a distance before the rope finally caught me.

I assessed my situation and saw that my right ankle was hanging onto the leg by the skin and bleeding profusely. This suggested an open fracture. I told Graham that I had broken my leg and to lower me. Graham lowered me as far as the rope would reach. There, on a ledge, I was able to clip into a green Totem I'd placed earlier and then clip an additional cam. I was able to lie down and get my foot over my head to help stop the bleeding. I was scared I might bleed out.

A pair of climbers on an adjacent route saw what happened, and one of them, Ben K. (a physician's assistant), called emergency medical services. He did an outstanding job, letting rescuers know our exact location and the state of my injury.

Ben's partner, Jacob, climbed up. He got up quickly and built an anchor. He then preparing to descend with me to the ground. Jacob was able to get me into a position on his back that allowed my broken foot to hang free. It also prevented any further damage. With additional ropework and effort, we were able to reach the ground.

The first rescue squad members reached the scene around 45 minutes from the time of Ben's call. I was assessed, given IVs, and packaged into a litter. Over the next 30 to 45 minutes, additional rescuers arrived to assist in the carry-out. Approximately one hour later, I was placed in a waiting ambulance and transported to a helicopter that airlifted me to Greenville (South Carolina) Memorial Hospital for treatment. (Source: Taylor Fields.)

ANALYSIS

Here's what I learned from this experience:

1. If I have any doubts about any aspect of a climb, I need to assess with my partner and come up with a plan, like perhaps climbing a different route.
2. Listen to the guidebook. There's a reason the route description says to belay at the Shark's Fin.
3. It was a disservice to my partner to take him on a route with this level of commitment. We could have worked up to this level of climbing instead of attacking it as our fourth multi-pitch climb together.
4. I was clearly climbing above my level. I let the fact that Graham and I had had successful climbs in the past make me think my skills were sharper than they actually were.
5. I shouldn't have climbed past the halfway point on the rope on a route I didn't know or was giving me a lot of trouble. Graham was not able to lower me to the ground because of that. In the immediate aftermath, he had no way to escape the belay.
6. Place good gear. I should have focused on making each gear placement as good as it could be.
7. Things to do before climbing again:
 - Take a wilderness first aid/responder course
 - Carry a medical kit in my pack with the appropriate supplies
 - Clearly assess routes with my partner before climbing
 - Practice partner and self-rescue techniques
 - Gain more experience placing solid gear by practicing on easier routes. (Sources: Taylor Fields and Graham P.)

Images

Article Details

Author	Taylor Fields and Graham P
Publication	ANAM
Volume	13
Issue	76
Page	66
Copyright Date	2023
Article Type	Accident reports