



## AAC Publications

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### **FALL ON ROCK – Stranded, Unprepared for Cold**

North Carolina, Pisgah National Forest, Linville Gorge Wilderness, Table Rock

**At approximately 6 p.m. on December 21, Burke County Emergency Dispatch received a cell phone call from a male climber (MC) on Table Rock Mountain.** The caller stated that he was at the top of My Route (2 pitches, 5.6), located at the north end of Table Rock. His partner was stranded on a ledge approximately 50 to 60 feet below and out of sight. According to MC, she (FC) was uninjured and had water, food, and a headlamp. Temperatures were near freezing, with high gusty winds and a forecast for rain or freezing rain coming later that evening.

Two members from Burke County Search and Rescue and one Burke County EMS Special Ops medic responded to the call, arriving at the Table Rock trailhead at approximately 6:45 p.m. Rescuers accessed the top of My Route and made contact with MC. They found him to be in the early stages of hypothermia. MC was able to tell rescuers that FC had fallen and had swung about 30 feet off route. She was unable to get back on the climb since the route traversed across the top of a prominent roof.

Rescuers set up a rappel and descended to FC, approximately 60 to 65 feet below the top and under the large roof. They found that FC was showing signs of mild hypothermia and was very reluctant to move. With encouragement and assistance from the rescuers, FC was able to climb to the summit using a hand line fixed by a rescuer and features on the face. Both climbers walked out without assistance, and FC's condition improved once the group began the hike out.

### **ANALYSIS**

The leader needs to be aware of the potential dynamics and consequences in case of a fall not only to him/herself but also to those following, especially when a traverse is involved. This incident may have been mitigated had there been additional protection placed on the moves above the roof. There is a bolt at the roof and one approximately 10 to 15 feet beyond. To prevent a swing, protection placed between the two bolts may have been helpful.

Having self-rescue skills and tools in a situation where a potential fall into space is also important. A set of prusiks and the knowledge in their use could have allowed FC to finish the route. In addition, the ability to escape a belay to provide assistance is a valuable skill that all climbers should possess. MC was belaying directly from the anchor, but he didn't appear to know how to lock off his device so he could go hands-free, nor escape the anchor.

While they did have food and water, neither climber had enough clothing to make it through the night. If rescuers had been unable to reach them or they hadn't been able to call, their mild hypothermia symptoms would have escalated within a few hours. If rescuers hadn't arrived promptly, FC wouldn't have been able to climb out, even with assistance. (Source: Nick Massey, Burke County Search and Rescue.)

## Images

## Article Details

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