



AAC Publications

Preface

This is my second year of editing Accidents. I haven't been involved with this book long enough to grasp all the larger trends, but I did see some emerging patterns in 2022. Climbing is becoming ever more popular, and with that comes accidents related to crowding. Most disturbing of these were three incidents in which a bystander at the base of a crag was struck by rockfall from above. Two of these accidents led to fatalities.

The popularity of climbing also has given rise to the proliferation of climbing-related Internet media. While most of what gets viewed on the Internet is not intended to encourage unsafe practices, it no doubt plays on our conscious or subconscious minds. The pros make it look so easy, and there's almost always a happy ending. This penalty-free interpretation of reality can, in the real world, play out in attempts to emulate what we admire or to garner digital capital. In this book, there were six reported free soloing accidents, leading to five deaths.

The Internet also supplies an endless stream of highly technical and sometimes contradictory how-to information. While it is tempting to try to master the tools and techniques that one discovers on the flat screen, there is no substitute for real-world instruction that takes place in the real world. My hunch is that several serious accidents reported in 2022 came about through well-meaning yet ill-advised self-training, derived from things found on the Internet. In the outdoors, there's no reset button and gravity speaks with an eloquence rarely found on YouTube. This is what makes climbing real.

This year's book also includes three rappel anchor failures in which a sling broke. These caused the deaths of three very experienced climbers. A fourth climber, about whom you'll also read in these pages, was fortunate to survive. These failures were caused by old slings on obscure anchors. In one case sling material on a well-traveled alpine descent broke after long exposure to intense UV light and frost wedging of the anchor block. The use of nylon slings dates back to the 1950s, and time has been marching on. What were once solid anchors are now ticking time bombs.

Another trend has emerged from the divergence of indoor sport and outdoor trad climbing. While one branch (sport) rewards pure athleticism, the other (trad) carries a high penalty for unrestrained enthusiasm. One issue lies in the fact that both distinct branches use a common grading system. The grade assigned to a top rope in the gym, a route at the sport crag, an unprotected offwidth, or an alpine adventure climb often becomes the sole determining factor by which the less experienced climber chooses their next climb. While grades are a measure of perceived physical difficulty, they account for little else. And while a new gym climber these days has the advantage of rapidly acquiring loads of physical ability, they might lack the experience to translate it safely into another style of ascent. This is not their fault, but it is becoming their problem.

Finally, after months of swimming through accident reports, I've discovered something else. Against a backdrop of mishap, misadventure, and terrible tragedy, there lies a silver lining. When there's an accident, climbers come together. We help each other. Petty bickering, tribalism, and unbridled egos get pushed aside. When this happens, the best in us has a chance to shine. This is also what makes climbing real.

Once again, I am grateful to the volunteers who make this publication possible. My gratitude extends to all our correspondents, contributors, photographers, and to those individuals who directly

report to us. You know who you are.

– **Pete Takeda, Editor**

Images

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