



AAC Publications

Lead Fall on Rock — Weight Differential

Kentucky, Red River Gorge, Bald Rock Recreational Preserve

I was getting back into outdoor climbing after a long break. I have been doing a lot of gym climbing over the last six years, including leading 5.11 in the gym. I started getting back outdoors. To optimize my time, I hired an AMGA-certified guide.

On November 18, we had a great day, with me comfortably sport-leading five 5.6s, a 5.9, then three 5.10a/b routes. We then started moving to a different area and walked past Coll (5.10b/c). Although I was tired, the line looked too beautiful to ignore.

Leading the climb, I came off just below the fourth bolt and landed on my ass on the bottom ledge. Pretty sure I fell about 40 feet. I was decelerating by the time I sat down hard on the ledge, which was about ten feet up on the route. I felt a jarring impact and strained the muscles in my back, but that appeared to be it.

ANALYSIS

The 80-pound weight difference between me and my belayer pulled her up when I came off. At the gym, I would have used an Ohm* or anchored my partner to the floor or a sandbag. Despite thinking of the sport crag as an outdoor gym (another mistake), I did not consider the weight differential. (Source: Robert Bernstein.)

***Editor's Note:** The Edelrid Ohm II is the latest iteration of the company's "assisted-braking resistor" device. The Ohm is clipped to the first bolt of a route to increase the braking effect when climbing in rope teams with major weight differences.

Images

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