



AAC Publications

Leader Fall — Runout

North Carolina, Stone Mountain State Park, Stone Mountain

The south face of Stone Mountain with climbers seen on (left to right) Rainy Day Women (5.10a R) and No Alternative (5.5). The historic Grand Funk Railroad (5.9-) follows a line of barely visible “railroad” dikes on the right side of this photograph. It was the scene of an ankle-breaking leader fall in March. Photo: Mike Flint

On March 5, C. Schmidt (44) and I (J. Eudy, 53) started up Grand Funk Railroad (5 pitches, 5.9-). I was super-focused and led the first (crux) pitch without issue. I brought up my partner, and he led the second pitch. The third pitch gets progressively easier but doesn't have any bolts or gear placements. Instead, it's protected by slinging horns.

I started up the third pitch and climbed 10 to 15 feet above the belay. Before reaching the first horn (protection), I shifted my weight to my right foot and felt my foot slip. I began to slide. At this point I wasn't concerned, since I was on low-angle slab and expected to slide until the rope went tight. Unfortunately, as I slid past the belay, my left foot caught a tiny ledge, twisting my ankle and flipping me on my back. C. did a great job pulling in as much rope as he could, and I stopped six feet below the anchor.

My initial assessment revealed some minor abrasions on my side and elbows, but when I tried to stand I felt severe pain in my left ankle. Within a few minutes, the ankle had swelled and I was unable to weight it, so we decided to bail. From the pitch-two anchors, it was a double-rope rappel to the base. I descended, weighting my right foot only, while C. packed out all the gear and helped me hobble to where we were able to get a ride down to the lower parking lot.

An X-ray and MRI showed that I had a grade 2 sprain (a partially torn ligament), a small fracture in my tibia, and a non-displaced fracture of my talus. I would not consider this fall high impact, and I was surprised at how easy it was to fracture my ankle.

ANALYSIS

This accident was totally avoidable. I was hyper-focused on the first pitch and then mentally shifted gears when I started up the third. In my head, climbing the remainder of the route was easy, and I got complacent. If I had given the entire route the same focus that I did on the first pitch, I would not have slipped and sustained this injury. (Source: J. Eudy.)

Images



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Article Details

Author	J. Eudy
Publication	ANAM
Volume	13
Issue	11
Page	72
Copyright Date	2024
Article Type	Accident reports