



AAC Publications

Ground Fall — Removed Anchor before Rappel

Oregon, Smith Rock State Park, Rope de Dope Block

On April 21, Cohen Schaumann (11) fell 40 feet to the ground while climbing at Smith Rock with his grandfather, Scott Phillips. The pair had climbed together on multiple occasions over the prior year. Their sessions included top-roping and a successful rappel lesson. On the 21st, Phillips and Schaumann were climbing on Rope de Dope, a large block with easily accessed bolt anchors that facilitate top-roping. It is a popular destination for climbing classes and beginners.

Phillips and Schaumann climbed some 5.7s, and then the youngster tried and struggled on a few of the 5.9s. They decided to climb Rope de Dope Crack (5.8). Phillips scrambled up the back of the rock (accessed via a ladder) to set up the climb. Unprompted, Schaumann followed Phillips to the top of the rock. Phillips intended only to set up a top-rope, but when Schaumann appeared, the former decided to give him some rappel practice.

Phillips set up the anchor by the book and dropped the rope with both ends clearly seen on the ground. He set up Schaumann on a two-strand rappel with a tube-style rappel device. The youngster was clipped in with a PAS. According to Climbing.com, “Now Cohen leaned back on his rappel device, ‘and it looked good,’ said Phillips. ‘His [PAS] was loose, the anchor was tight, and he had his full weight on the rappel device. I felt good about everything.’”

Phillips climbed down to the ground and circled the block to put his grandson on a fireman’s belay. Schaumann appeared to be ready. All he needed to do was unclip his PAS and rappel, something he had done quite recently. Phillips recounted in Climbing, “At this point, I walked closer and loosely grabbed the ropes, and took my phone out to take another picture of him. Then I heard a yell, looked up, and he was coming down feet first.” Schaumann hit the wall midway down, “and then he went pretty much face first into the ground.”

Schaumann had fallen 40 feet, narrowly avoiding some jagged rocks. Because they were at a popular venue, help arrived fast. This included a Wilderness First Responder, a police officer with EMT certification, and wilderness response team in training from Western Oregon University.

Schaumann suffered a broken pelvis, wrist, ankle, and ribs. He had two collapsed lungs, a lacerated liver and kidney, and fractures in two spinal vertebrae. According to his family’s GoFundMe site, Schaumann was expected to make a full recovery.

ANALYSIS

When Schaumann landed on the ground, he was accompanied by the anchor slings, locking carabiners, the rope, and his PAS. He had apparently dismantled the anchor before starting to rappel. Said Phillips, “In his inexperience and exuberance to rappel, I think he just unclipped the entire anchor along with his [PAS] when he went to rappel.”

In an ideal world, there could have been one person at the top to oversee the rappel and one person at the bottom to provide a fireman’s belay. There might even have been a top-rope belay while Schaumann rappelled. Such steps likely would have prevented the accident. However, given that the pair had successfully practiced rappelling previously, such techniques also might be overabundant. It

would be hard to anticipate the youngster removing the entire anchor prior to stepping off the edge.
(Sources: Climbing.com, Cohen Schaumann's GoFundMe page, and Centraloregondaily.com.)

Images

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