



AAC Publications

Leader Fall on Rock — Protection Pulled Out

Wyoming, Lander, Sinks Canyon, Sandstone Buttress

Gunky is a popular route in Sinks Canyon that protects well with hexes and nuts. Familiarity with passive gear and more cam-placing skills might have helped prevent an accident that occurred in July 2023. The high X marks where Taylor fell, and the low X marks where he landed. Photo: Joe M.

On the morning of July 10, Mac Taylor (25) fell on the first pitch of Gunky (2 pitches, 5.8). He wrote the following account for ANAC:

Two friends and I hiked to the base of Gunky at the Sandstone Buttress. I was new to the area. We hiked with gear on our harnesses while carrying ropes and a bag with water and extra gear. I decided to lead the first pitch, despite being told that there was a scary roof section. Part of the reason I chose to lead it was that I already had most of the gear racked on my harness. On the route, I placed a large nut and a number 1 Camalot. I then clipped a bolt and placed a 0.75 Camalot in a shallow slot deep in the crack I was climbing.

Halfway up the pitch, I rested and placed a number 2 Camalot deep in an offwidth-sized crack. I laybacked the crack and got established below the roof. From there, I struggled to find comfortable holds. I was about ten feet above my last piece.

I decided to backtrack. My belayer was pulling in slack while I downclimbed. About five feet above my last piece, I fell. My hands slipped first, and my feet were still on the wall. I flipped upside down and pulled two pieces. The number 2 was a good placement, but it was placed straight in the crack, not oriented in the direction of the fall. It levered out and tweaked the cam lobes. The 0.75 just pulled out. I was caught by the bolt after falling 30 feet. My belayer was yanked up then dropped back to the ground as the last piece pulled. This resulted in bruising on their elbows and lower back. I split my lip, sprained my ankle, and cut up my left forearm, with heavy bruising on the right side of my abdomen from my harness.

I had stopped right before hitting a ledge. I was lowered to our belay stance, a very large ledge above a slabby wall. My belayer ran down to the car to grab my first-aid kit while I lay on the ground. In the parking lot was an AMGA guide who was also a Wilderness Emergency Medical Technician (WEMT). With their help, we put gauze on my bleeding arm and my lip. We also put a SAM Splint on my ankle. Rather than navigate the entire approach, the guide lowered me down the slabby wall. I walked out with the help of my friends, and we went to the emergency room. I was given a stirrup and crutches for my ankle, and I got stitches in my lip. I had no internal injuries.

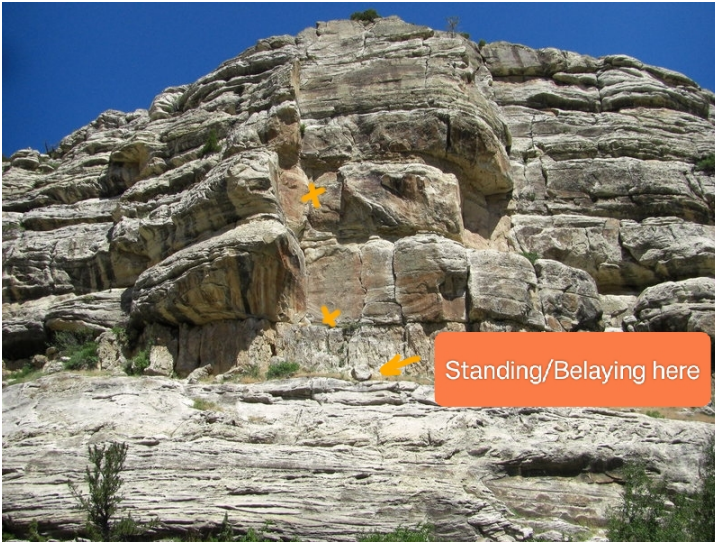
ANALYSIS

Taylor wrote, "I think the two biggest factors were my overconfidence and my poor gear placements. I had been warned the route had a scary section, and it was the hardest trad climb I would have done up to that time. I definitely should have let a friend lead this pitch while I took the second, less scary pitch. I also really thought I had placed some good pieces on the climb. I should go back and practice my placements more and get some critical feedback from someone more experienced." (Source: Mac Taylor.)

***Editor's Note:** The safe use of cams requires education and skill. Employing passive gear on routes like

Gunky might be safer and can teach or reinforce basic protection principles. Kyle Williams on Mountain Project wrote that Gunky "can be led with all passive gear...medium to large hexes, a set of nuts, and some tri-cams." "Kyle P." added that there is a "bomber" medium nut placement above the roof where Taylor became fatigued: "Place it before going over.... Just drop it in, tug it, and go."

Images



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