



AAC Publications

Fall From Anchor — Unfamiliar Knot

Arizona, Queen Creek, The Pond

On January 30, Claire Amiel (34) fell while cleaning an anchor on a sport route at the popular Pond area in Queen Creek. The fall from the anchor, resulted in her death.

According to a source that wishes to remain anonymous, Amiel was the less experienced of two climbers. The anonymous source wrote to ANAC: “Claire fell from the top of a route while cleaning the anchor. It’s rumored she was tied in to an alpine butterfly knot. After clipping the mussy hooks, she weighted the wrong side of the butterfly knot.”

ANALYSIS

For most rock climbing, the choice of an alpine butterfly is unusual. John Godino at Alpinesavvy.com wrote to ANAC, “The butterfly is generally not a standard beginner climbing knot. It is almost always used for glacier travel to tie in the middle climber to the middle of a rope. Rock climbers almost always tie into the end of the rope, especially when top-roping in a sport area.”

Had Amiel been using a mid-rope alpine butterfly knot—and if she clipped in direct at the anchor temporarily to clean the quickdraws there—it would have created two lengths of slack rope extending from both ends of the knot. Though both sides would appear nearly identical, only one would have been belayed. Amiel may have top-roped to the anchor, clipped the unbelayed strand into the mussy hooks, and then fallen to the ground.

Climbers of limited experience or those transitioning from the gym to the outdoors can be especially vulnerable when cleaning anchors. The use of unusual or unfamiliar knots, gear, or systems in critical situations like lowering or cleaning is very dangerous.

Godino adds, “I would love to see more ground-level anchor stations near beginner areas or on the approach trail. This would provide beginner climbers a place to practice clipping and cleaning, before they get on the rock. (Sources: Anonymous, John Godino, and the Editors.)

Images

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