



AAC Publications

Long Pendulum fall

North Carolina, Linville Gorge, Amphitheater

The rugged Linville Gorge is a quality Southeastern climbing destination and also a designated wilderness area. The relative isolation of these crags needs consideration when planning a climb. Photo: Ken Thomas — Wikimedia

On January 19, MC and FC started their approach to the Amphitheater to climb The Daddy (500 feet, 5.6). They parked at the seasonally locked gate below the Table Rock Recreation Area and hiked to the Amphitheater, adding three miles (an extra hour or two) to the round trip. The weather was good when they left the car. However, upon their arrival at the base of the climb later in the day, the wind was increasing and the temperature was dropping.

The pair climbed the first pitches without incident. While following the penultimate pitch, FC fell, swinging across the face. She tumbled, rolled, and struck her left leg on sharp rock. She stopped below MC, with a laceration below her left knee and bruises to her right leg. MC lowered her to a ledge. She attended to her wound as MC rebuilt the anchor and rappelled to her. They fashioned a compression dressing using a sling and a hat and called 911. Then MC ascended the rappel rope and created a mechanical advantage system to assist FC up to his stance with overhead tension. He then led the remainder of the route and used the same system to assist FC to the top. Upon completing the climb, they notified 911 that they were on top.

Rescuers en route knew the weather was getting worse. They advised the pair to walk to the main Amphitheater trail. The rescuers reached the climbers approximately an hour after dark. They were able to manage FC's injuries and provide both climbers with food, hydration, and more clothing layers. The group arrived at the trailhead at 7:45 p.m. The temperature had dropped to 18°F with wind of 20 mph and blowing snow. FC went to the ER and received 14 stitches.

ANALYSIS

Wind, ice, cold rock, low light, and other environmental factors may have contributed to FC's fall. January has short days, and the local forecast called for cold temperatures, high winds, and snow later in the day. This should have been enough to cancel the climb. Neither climber had enough gear or food to spend the night. Fortunately, MC had the knowledge and ability to successfully self-rescue the team to the top of the climb. (Sources: Jon Massey, James Robinson, Burke County SAR, and the Editors.)

Images



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