



AAC Publications

Fall on Rock

North Carolina, Blue Ridge Mountains, Laurel Knob

Laurel Knob is one of the tallest crags in the eastern U.S. and home to some serious multipitch climbing. Formerly a clandestine climbing destination on private land, the 1,200-foot granite dome was purchased by the Carolina Climbers Coalition in 2006. Fathom (5.10a) takes the big right-trending dihedral. Photo Tim Wheatley

On October 19, two climbers set off to climb Fathom, an eight-pitch 5.10a slab route on Laurel Knob. The lead climber had four years of multipitch experience. He planned to have his partner lead the initial pitch, but upon their arrival, the climb appeared manageable enough for an onsight.

Starting up, the lead climber placed solid protection in horizontal cracks and reached a rest 35 feet above the ground. Here the climbing became trickier. There were two apparent options: a direct line on friction over a bulge or a shallow, unprotected depression to the left. The belayer suggested placing a backup cam and taking the easier (left) option. The leader struggled to figure out the traverse. He then signaled to his partner that he was going to take the direct line.

After some tenuous moves, he climbed ten feet above his last placement. Then he lost traction and fell. The belayer took in slack and braced as the lead climber tumbled 20 feet, impacting his left ankle and stopping 15 to 20 feet off the ground. Initially feeling unhurt, he soon noticed pain in his ankle. They decided to abandon the climb.

ANALYSIS

Assessment: Although the first pitch appeared straightforward, the challenging terrain wasn't apparent until mid-pitch. The leader could have downclimbed to his protection to traverse or retreat.

Communication and Preferences: The belayer was the more experienced climber and was cautious about giving beta or making suggestions. The leader was accustomed to getting more guidance. He would have benefitted from understanding their different approaches to communication and giving beta.

Skill and Difficulty Match: Although excited by the manageable appearance of the first pitch, he might have been better served to have his partner lead. He emailed ANAC, "I think the low angle does make it look easier, but I've had to bail off other routes on Laurel Knob. I have a healthy respect for North Carolina slab." (Source: Lead Climber.)

Images



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