



AAC Publications

Anchor Failure

Utah, Moab Area, River Road

Sorcerer's Apprentice Left (5.11c) climbs two pitches up the shaded, left-facing corner. A lone climber fell to his death in spring of 2024 while retrieving a stuck rappel rope. Photo: Eric Dixon

On the evening of April 21, Grand County Search and Rescue was notified of an overdue male climber (approximate age 25). At 3 p.m., the subject had described to co-workers his plan to retrieve a stuck rope by himself; he did not return to work. The subject's car was found at the parking area for the Sorcerer's Apprentice formation along River Road.

The subject had posted on the "Moab Rock Climbers" Facebook group earlier that day, agreeing to retrieve a stuck rope from the Sorcerer's Apprentice Left route (2 pitches, 5.11c). Another party had posted a request for help because they were leaving town and couldn't retrieve the rope themselves. The subject simply responded "got it" to the post but did not request any additional information.

The left side of the Sorcerer's Apprentice is also the standard rappel route for both routes on the formation. A double-rope rappel descends the long first pitch (5.10+) of Sorcerer's Apprentice Left. Presumably, the rappel rope got stuck partway down from the top of the pitch when pulled by the other climbing team the previous day.

The subject was found deceased at the base of the formation. He was rigged to ascend; the rope still ran through a Grigri clipped to the belay loop of his harness and through a Micro Traxion (with attached foot loop) above the Grigri. He was trailing a second climbing rope with him but had no additional climbing gear. It appears the subject fell about 70 feet, sustaining fatal injuries. Likely he was ascending the stuck rope when it dislodged from whatever was holding it in place.

ANALYSIS

It is clear that the rope was not securely attached despite holding the climber's body weight for some time. Never trust your life to a rope without knowing it is securely anchored. A safer alternative would have been to re-lead the pitch while placing gear. The subject must have known/assumed that the stuck rope was somehow jammed in the bolt anchor at the top of the pitch as he did not have any gear on his harness to build a retreat anchor, nor to protect his progress up whatever might have remained of the pitch. (Sources: Grand County Search and Rescue and the Editors.)

Images



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