



AAC Publications

Unfinished Knot

Washington, Vantage, Millennium Wall

In recent years, Frenchman Coulee, a.k.a. Vantage, has emerged as a destination climbing area, with sport routes and superb crack climbs on columnar basalt. Pictured here is a popular area known as the Feathers. The density of routes and ease of access can make for a very social— and distracting—environment. Photo: Walter Seigmund — Wikimedia

On November 23, I (Randy Bracht) was climbing with friends in the Frenchman Coulee area near Vantage, Washington. These desert cliffs are a popular cragging destination for climbers from around the Pacific Northwest.

We were at Millennium Wall, which mostly consists of single-pitch bolted sport climbs ranging up to 60 feet in height. I was leading a route called Heel Higher Crescent (10a). I was 35 feet off the deck and about to clip the fourth bolt when I noticed my rewoven figure-8 knot dangling about a foot below my harness.

“Whaaaat?” I thought, momentarily confused. “Why does that look so weird?”

I realized that my figure-8 knot had never been rewoven. On the ground, I got engaged in a conversation with my belayer. In my distracted state, I forgot to finish tying the knot. I also forgot to check it myself and forgot to do a partner check with my belayer. This felt monumentally stupid for a guy who has been climbing for over 30 years without suffering any serious accidents...so far.

Fortunately, the tail end of the rope had not slipped out of the leg and waist loops on my harness and I was positioned at a bolt that I could quickly clip with my anchor sling. Dangling there, I finished tying my rewoven figure-8 and completed the route without incident.

ANALYSIS

No harm, no foul, whether by providence or sheer dumb luck, right? I could let this sobering episode slip by without public notice and personal embarrassment. But, if you'll allow a religious analogy, it's good to confess your sin before the congregation, with the hope of saving another soul.

You've heard this before and from better people than me, but I'll repeat it: Don't allow yourself to be distracted while tying in. At the gym, at the crag, in the mountains. Finish that lifesaving knot. Do partner checks, but don't expect your partner/belayer to ask to look at it before leaving the ground. **INSIST** that they look at it. Belayers, do likewise. (Source: Randy Bracht.)

Images



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