



AAC Publications

Fall on Rock — Rope Drag, Protection Pulled

New York, Shawangunks, Trapps Area

On August 28 at 1:20 p.m., an individual called the Mohonk Preserve Visitor Center reporting that a 63-year-old male and self-described experienced climber had fallen from the upper section of Horseman (120', 5.5). Approximately 20 feet from the top, the climber had become overwhelmed by rope drag and fatigue. When he fell, he pulled his two highest pieces of (self-placed) gear and dropped past a ten-foot-wide roof formed by a hanging corner on the route.

The climber was not wearing a helmet and struck his head on the wall below the large roof. He stopped after 75 feet, his fall arrested by the belayer about ten feet off the ground. The belayer lowered him to the ground. Rangers arrived on scene five minutes later. The climber had injuries to the neck/C-spine, back of the head, and left ankle, along with abrasions. Rangers ushered EMS personnel to the scene and extricated the climber to an ambulance.

ANALYSIS

The fallen climber's female climbing partner/belayer informed the rangers on scene that prior to his lead, she'd asked her partner if he was going to wear a helmet. The leader responded that he didn't need to, a refusal perhaps due to an old-school mentality.

To lead Horseman effectively in a single pitch, a leader must carefully use extended runners, especially through the traverse, to reduce rope drag. The belayer noted that the leader hadn't been climbing regularly in recent years, and rangers observed that his gear was several generations old. Complacency and deteriorated skills are persistent hazards for returning climbers; a combination of inadequate rope management, unrefined placement skills, and overconfidence likely contributed to the fall.

The ten-foot-wide roof he fell past may have mitigated impact forces by creating distance between the last rope-to-rock contact point and where the climber swung into the wall. (Source: Mohonk Preserve Climbing Rangers.)

Images



Horseman is a renowned Gunks classic. Established as two pitches, the route is now typically done in one 120-foot pitch. In summer 2025, a climber fell 75 feet from near the top due to rope drag and fatigue. Managing rope drag through the traverse requires the judicious use of long runners.

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