



Fall on Rock – Incomplete Tie-In Knot

Canada, Québec, Racine, Lac Larouche

On September 17, two female climbers in their 20s were top-roping a 5.10c route called Gueuse. One climber had just completed the route. The sun was going to set in 20 to 30 minutes. Everyone else at the crag had just left, so the two climbers were alone.

The climber reported the incident as follows: “I completed my figure 8 knot, but at the exit of the knot I didn’t leave enough rope. I left only 1.5 to 2 inches of rope. I really didn’t feel like redoing my knot and had done this [in the] past with no issue. And I just started climbing without performing a partner check.”

While exiting an overhang, her hand slipped. “I fell away from the wall as the rope took my weight and slowed me down for a fraction of a second. The knot had come undone [and] I was falling toward the ground.”

The climber landed feet-first and ended up with a fractured calcaneus in her left foot and a laceration on her right leg that needed five stitches. The belayer helped the injured climber to hop from the forest back to the parking area, 500 meters away, and then drove her to the hospital.

ANALYSIS

The incident described is reminiscent of Lynn Hill’s famous accident in Buoux, France, in which she fell at least 20 meters to the ground after failing to complete a figure 8 tie-in. This is clearly what happened in the accident described above. A properly and fully completed figure 8 will not suddenly untie or become detached. The climber likely began threading the rope end to retrace the initial figure 8 and then got sidetracked. As she pointed out, neither she nor her second checked her knot. In hindsight, the reporting climber acknowledged this was likely the case. Distraction may have been a factor, as well as fatigue or rushing because of the lateness of the day.

Always complete your tie-in without distraction, perform a check, and get your partner to inspect your knot before you climb. Also assess your belayer’s readiness to belay.

It should be noted that the injured climber’s partner left most of their gear in order to evacuate her partner. This was a good call. Unless the gear is required for rescue, first aid, evacuation, or safety, leave it behind. The rescuer’s priority is the injured climber.

Images

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