



AAC Publications

Rappel Error – Uneven Ropes, No Stopper Knots

West Virginia, New River Gorge, Endless Wall, Fern Point

At 7:15 p.m. on July 15, a 22-year-old male climber rappelled off one of the ends of his rope while descending from S'more Energy (5.11c) on the Party Buttress. He fell approximately 40 feet and landed primarily on his feet, suffering multiple injuries. He was treated and evacuated by NPS rangers and local rescue personnel, and then transported by ambulance and helicopter to a nearby medical center. (Source: National Park Service IMARS incident report.)

ANALYSIS

The climber noted in an interview with NPS rangers that his party had lowered from the same anchors prior to the accident, verifying that their rope was long enough for the rappel. He also noted that he had used an autoblock backup for his rappel device, but that he had not confirmed that the rope ends were on the ground and had not tied stopper knots in either strand. Either of these precautions would have prevented this accident.

This was the second serious rappelling accident of the year at the New River Gorge. The New River Alliance of Climbers (NRAC) encourages visiting climbers to lower off anchors in the New River Gorge rather than rappel. Worn anchors are easily replaced—lives are not. (Source: The Editors.)

Images

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