



AAC Publications

Rappel Error – Uneven Ropes, No Stopper Knots

West Virginia, New River Gorge, Junkyard Area

At approximately 5:30 p.m. on March 25, a 25-year-old male climber set up a rappel at the bolted anchors of Frigidator Crack (5.10b) and began to descend. Approximately halfway down, the climber rappelled off the end of one of the strands of his 60-meter rope and fell 30 to 40 feet to the ground. The climber suffered numerous injuries, including head trauma (he did not wear a helmet), and was flown to Charleston Area Medical Center. (Source: National Park Service IMARS incident report.)

ANALYSIS

Frigidator Crack is located between the main wall of Junkyard and a large detached flake that creates a narrow cave. The anchors for this route are easily accessible from the top of the cliff and are often used by climbers and guides to rappel. While the rappel is not difficult to set up, the bottom of the cave can be difficult to see clearly in low light conditions, and this likely contributed to the climber's rope ends being uneven.

If a rope does not have an accurate midpoint marked, climbers should ask people below if both ends are on the ground before committing to a rappel. When this isn't an option, the two rope ends should be lowered together so you can be certain the rope's midpoint is at the anchor. This is also yet another example of the value of stopper knots in both ends of rappel ropes. Although some climbers feel the placement of stopper knots is unnecessary in single-pitch terrain, doing so in this instance would have prevented the accident. (Source: The Editors.)

Images



The view down from the anchors above Frigidator Crack. The dark cave below may make it hard to see the rope ends when setting up a rappel.



View up the cave toward the anchors above Frigidator Crack.

Article Details

Author	
Publication	ANAM
Volume	10
Issue	71
Page	0
Copyright Date	2018
Article Type	Accident reports