



AAC Publications

Rappel Error – Climbing Alone

Utah, Zion National Park, Moonlight Buttress

On the afternoon of March 9, two climbers on the Moonlight Buttress route reported that someone had fallen from above them. Rangers investigated and located the body of a male at the base of the climb. This individual, Eric Klimt, 36, was wearing a harness and climbing shoes, and he had a closed Grigri belay device clipped to the belay loop of his harness.

It is possible to hike to the top of Moonlight Buttress via the West Rim Trail. Investigators found that the climber had fixed a 70-meter rope to the top anchor on the climb, rappelled to the next anchor down, and fixed the rope again there. It is common practice to fix the upper pitches of Moonlight Buttress in order to practice free climbing with a self-belay system. It appears this is what the subject was planning to do. Other than the rope and the gear he was carrying when he fell, the rest of the climber's gear remained on the rim.

While the exact cause of the fall will never be known, the evidence suggests he either rappelled off the end of the rope or made an error while transferring from the rappel rope to an anchor or vice-versa. There was no knot tied in the end of the rope. There also did not appear to be any kind of backup on the rope or harness.

ANALYSIS

A knot at the end of the rope on rappels, especially where it is known that the rope does not reach the ground, adds a safety backup that may prevent a person from rappelling off the end of the rope. A friction hitch such as an autoblock or prusik, tied around the rope and clipped to the harness, provides another form of backup. When transferring from an anchor to a fixed line or rappel rope, and vice versa, it's essential to weight and test the new connection before unclipping from the previous system. Although it's not certain if any of these steps would have prevented this tragedy, they are known to prevent many rappelling and self-belay accidents. (Source: Ranger Andrew P. Fitzgerald, Zion National Park.)

Images

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