



AAC Publications

Lowering Error – Rope Pulled Through Device, No Helmet

North Carolina, Hanging Rock State Park, Moore's Wall

Late in the afternoon on April 16, a male climber (28) was injured after falling approximately 20 feet to the ground in the Moore's Wall Amphitheater while being lowered from the route Quaker State (5.11a). The belayer's end of the rope slipped through the belay device before the climber reached the ground, precipitating the fall. The patient was conscious when EMS arrived and complained of head pain. Upon arriving at the hospital, the climber was diagnosed with a fractured temporal bone and cerebral hemorrhage in the back of his head. He was not wearing a helmet. (Source: Hanging Rock State Park.)

ANALYSIS

This route is about 100 feet high, so lowering with a 60-meter (197-foot) rope would provide no margin for error. Although the precise circumstances are not known, ropes shrink with age, making it possible the climbers' rope was shorter than believed. It's also possible that the method the climber used to thread the anchors for lowering used up significant amounts of rope.

This type of incident continues to be a problem at climbing areas across the country. These accidents can be prevented by closing the belay system, which can be done by: (1) Both climber and belayer tying into the rope; (2) Placing a stopper knot on the end of the rope; and/or (3) Tying the belayer's end of the rope to an anchor or rope bag. And, always wear a helmet. (Source: The Editors.)

Images



A stopper knot is one of the surest ways to prevent the rope from pulling through the belayer's device while lowering a climber.

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