



AAC Publications

Ground Fall – Improvised Harness Failure

New Hampshire, Rumney, Parking Lot Wall

On September 25, at about 4 p.m., a climber (age 68) was attempting to climb Dead Sea Equestrian (5.7 sport) at the Parking Lot Wall of Rumney. Near the top, approximately 50 feet above the base, he called for his belayer to “take” his weight onto the rope. As he weighted the belay system, his harness separated from the rope and he fell to the ground. Many nearby climbers immediately responded to the fallen climber and notified emergency medical personnel, who responded quickly. Despite their efforts, the climber was pronounced dead at the scene.

ANALYSIS

According to his belayer, the climber had forgotten to put his climbing harness in his car when he drove from his home, two hours away. He decided to improvise one out of kayak straps additionally secured with a leather belt. The DIY harness failed under body weight and separated from the rope where the leather belt broke at the buckle holes.

Although it is possible to improvise a “diaper sling” harness if climbers have appropriate webbing and other materials, this alternative will never be as secure nor as comfortable as a UIAA-certified climbing harness in good condition. A verbal or written checklist to remember critical items before leaving home could have prevented this incident. Sadly, the climber declined to borrow a harness that was offered by another climber in the parking lot. Additionally, there is a sporting equipment shop within 10 miles of this crag where a replacement harness could have been purchased. (Source: Lt. James Kneeland, New Hampshire Fish and Game.)

Images

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