

prior to his injury in May. The difference was that on his first fall at the crux, the piece, a #2 Camalot, held. On May 5th, it pulled. Why didn't it fail the first time he fell? Most likely because Ben took more time in placing it properly when he first encountered that spot. During the May 5 climb, he may have placed the Camalot too quickly and carelessly, assuming first that he knew what he was doing because he had fallen on the same piece at the same place before and all went well, and second that on this "return" visit to the route, he was READY TO CLIMB and did not expect to fall again.

Familiarity and practice placing gear, better position, and anticipation of "what if this piece pulls" may have prepared the climber for the unexpected. (Source: Ben Williams and Steve Longnecker)

## **FALL ON ROCK, PROTECTION FAILURE**

### **North Carolina, Looking Glass Rock, The Womb.**

Ian Randall (26) and I, Josh Whitmore (23), both experienced climbers were climbing The Womb (5.11) on the north side of Looking Glass Rock on June 9. The accident occurred on the first pitch. I was approximately 40 feet off the ground with a cam placed at foot level when I fell. The piece pulled and I fell to the ground landing in a seated position on a boulder at the base of the climb, followed by a roll onto the ground. I never hit my head. (I was wearing a helmet.) I experienced extreme pain in my coccyx and in the center of my back. Both Ian and I are Wilderness First Responders. He log-rolled me into a position on my back, completed primary and secondary surveys, stabilized me the best he could and went for help. There was no one else in the area.

One-and-a-half hours later, Ian returned with the local rescue squad who packaged me onto a backboard and litter, transporting me to a trailhead approximately two miles away. Members of the Schenck Job Corps and two North Carolina Outward Bound crews also assisted in the litter carry.

### **Analysis**

Forty feet seems like a long way up to have placed just one piece of protection, but due to the nature of the climb it was reasonable. The first 30 feet of the climb is a gently sloping slab (5.3-5.4) that offers no protection. The route then traverses up and right above steeper rock. This section is considerably harder but offers good protection. I climbed the easy section, placed a piece to protect myself for 3-4 feet of climbing to a rest stance. I placed a second piece (a mid-sized cam) as high as I could reach. I knew that I needed the first piece higher at the crux, so I backed cleaned it. This left me with only one placement, the mid-sized cam that was well placed in a horizontal crack. I went back and forth several times in the next section trying to work out the sequence. When I fell, I was in the process of down-climbing. I believe that the piece pulled because it had "walked" into a bad position from its original good placement due to the back and forth movement of the rope running through the protection carabiner.

In hindsight, there are a number of things that could have been done differently that may have prevented the piece from pulling. A long runner on the

cam would have created less drag, allowing the rope to run “smoother.” The cam could have been placed deeper into the crack to prevent “walking.” I could have placed more than one piece in opposition, equalized two pieces, or not back cleaned the first piece. One large lesson I learned is that the first piece needs to be a bomber placement, multidirectional, and minimal potential for “walking.” (Source: Josh Whitmore)

## **FALL OR SLIP ON ICE, ICE SCREW PULLED OUT, HASTE**

### **North Carolina, Celo Knob, The Crescent**

(The month of December was one of the coldest on record in North Carolina. The below-freezing temperatures created a variety of great ice climbing opportunities throughout the western part of the state.)

Around 3:00 p.m., my partner TS and I were finishing our second ice route of the day in the Black Mountain Range. Both routes were characteristic of the long gully climbs—easy to moderate ice with a few technical stretches no harder than WI3. I was beginning the last of the roped pitches, a short 30-foot section of relatively easy WI3. I had placed a good screw just off the belay, and then placed a second one five more feet above. I encountered a short section of névé near the end of the pitch which felt secure, although warranted some delicate climbing. To protect the top-out, I placed a third screw in the best ice I could find, knowing that it was not very solid but hoping it would be better than nothing. The angle lessened considerably at the top of the pitch, transforming into a flat ramp that continued towards the top of the mountain. After making a few more moves past the vertical section, I stepped up high to plant my left foot flat into the ice and finish the pitch using my tools as canes on such low-angle terrain. I planted the bottom of both tools into the ice and committed my weight onto my left foot when it skated off the ice, pitching me off backwards in a head-first fall. I remember the last screw failing as I fell and could see the ledge below me coming closer and closer. I hit the ledge with my head and shoulder blade, bounced, and continued to slide 20 more feet down the gully until I came to a halt. By the time I stopped, I had fallen 40 feet, dislocated my left shoulder, and stabbed my right knee with my crampon during the fall. TS came down to help me out and managed to reduce my shoulder. He pulled all our gear and helped me bushwhack several hundred feet down the ridge to our packs and walk the remaining miles back to the truck.

### **Analysis**

More so than climbing on rock, ice climbing takes keen judgment and the experience to know what is happening with the ice and what techniques are and are not safe. A contributing factor to my fall was rushing the pitch and wanting to get off the mountain after a long day. If I had continued to climb the pitch in the standard manner of planting the picks of both tools *firmly* before making a move instead of hastily resorting to a more efficient technique, I might not have fallen. Also, if I had not been wearing a helmet, I might not have lived to tell this tale. (Source: Brandon Calloway - 28)