

The man apparently dropped his cell phone into the 170-foot pit. He decided to get some equipment from his vehicle and rig a descent with a tow rope, a come-along, a pulley, and two ropes not rated for rope work of any kind. The tow-rope was girth hitched to a sturdy tree and the come-along was wrapped once around the tree and clipped back to itself near the end of the tow rope. This is where he had a pulley clipped to the come-along with the descending rope running through the pulley. The tie-off was with five half hitches and then the rope went down into the abyss. The end of the first rope was tied to the second rope in order to reach the bottom. The two ropes were tied together with a series of half-hitches.

The man told his girlfriend that he knew what he was doing and that he had done this type of thing before. He used two sets of gloves to grasp the rope with but did not have a harness of any sort and did not use any sort of friction device to slow his descent. He merely went hand over hand down into the pit, according to his girlfriend. She also said he made it about half way down before the bell of the bottom (estimated at approximately seventy to eighty feet), and then he lost his grip and fell backwards. She reported that he was laughing on the way down.

After he hit the bottom he apparently continued to laugh and stated that he thought he broke his arm. A minute later he said he could not move and could not feel his back, that all was numb. The girlfriend went for help to Santa Fe since there was no cell phone. She managed to get to a pay phone to call 911. Fire Department and Search and Rescue were activated. By the time rescue personnel made it to the scene the man had died.

There were rope burns on the man's gloves and his arms. He had bilateral leg fractures, a broken arm and died from internal injuries, either internal hemorrhage or neurogenic shock. (J. Marc Beverly, PA/Paramedic, Albuquerque Mountain Rescue Council)

Analysis

While this is not considered to be a "legitimate" climbing accident, it illustrates how quickly people with no experience can get in trouble trying to become climbers. In addition to the technical mistakes here, it seems this fellow appears to have been a few tools short of a full box.

Unfortunately, the press will portray an incident such as this as proof that climbing is a dangerous sport. (Sources: J. Marc Beverly, PA/Paramedic—Albuquerque Mountain Rescue Council, and Jed Williamson)

FALL OR SLIP ON ROCK

North Carolina, Pilot Mountain State Park

On Friday, February 22, I (J.W. Peterson) was walking along the cliff top when I heard Brian Zimmerman (20) yelling and sliding down the rock face below the Ledge Springs Trail. I called to the climbers on the trail below and asked them if anyone was hurt. Chris Jones (20) called back and said, "Yes," that Brian had sustained a head and neck injury, and a broken leg. From my vantage point above, I could see Jones administering first aid to Zimmerman. I left the scene to call 911. My call informed me that Surry

County EMS and Pilot Mountain Rescue were en route. I gave them the specific location of the accident and waited for them to arrive. Upon arrival, I accompanied rescue squad members to the top of the cliff where Zimmerman had fallen.

While leaving this site I was approached by Jessica Riley (20) and Zach Groff (20) who had been climbing with Zimmerman. I asked them to explain what had happened. They said that Zimmerman was free-soloing to the top of the cliff to set up a top rope climb. As he reached the top, he could not figure out how to go any higher. Advice from another climber was unsuccessful. Zimmerman slipped and fell approximately 30 feet.

Zimmerman was carried out by rescue squad members and transported to Baptist Hospital in Winston Salem, NC. Zimmerman suffered a laceration to the head that required several stitches, a broken right elbow and a broken lower right leg. (Source: J. W. Pearson, Pilot Mountain State Park)

Analysis

Pilot Mountain is a very popular and well established top rope climbing area. All climbs are easily accessible via the Ledge Springs Trail which runs along the top and bottom of the cliff. Climbers usually set up their climbs before descending to the base of the cliff or access the cliff top via the Three Bears Gully. The area is also known for loose rock and overhanging exits. Why the climber chose to free-solo to access the top is unknown. Free-solo climbing comes with increased inherent risks. (Source: Aram Attarian)

FALL ON ROCK, PROTECTION CAME OUT, NO HARD HAT

North Carolina, Linville Gorge, North Carolina Wall

On September 8, Colin Treiber, (20), and his partner were climbing Bumblebee Buttress (5.8), located on the North Carolina Wall in the Linville Gorge Wilderness Area. Treiber, an experienced climber, lost his balance before he was able to clip into his fifth piece of protection and began to fall. The rock where the fourth piece of protection was placed broke, causing the piece to come out. His first, second and third protection pieces remained but did not prevent him from hitting the base of the route. Additional reports suggest that he fell on the upper part of the first pitch well above his last piece of protection. When his last piece blew, it caused him to invert, striking the back of his head against the wall. A broken neck and concussion to the head were the major injuries. He was not wearing a helmet. CPR initiated by his partner was unsuccessful.

Experienced climbers at the scene said that Treiber was using the appropriate equipment and it was in good working order. Over 40 personnel from Burke County Emergency Services, Burke County EMS Special Operations Team, Jonas Ridge Fire and First Responders, Burke County Rescue Squad, Lake James Fire Department, Oak Hill Fire Department, Burke County REACT, North Carolina Outward Bound School, and Linville Central Rescue were involved in the body recovery. (Sources: Sharon McBrayer, *The News Herald*, September 9, 2002, and Aram Attarian)