

Analysis

I went into the Gorge with knowledge of the accident but not sure where it happened. When I arrived at the base of Bumblebee Buttress, my whole day changed. I saw two pieces of gear still in place on the route, the first piece, a well-placed .75 Camalot. It was about 15 feet up. The second was a #8 Metolius cam. It was about 20 feet higher, right below the crux of the first pitch. Both were in good rock with long slings. I saw no fifth piece. I had planned on soloing the route, but only went up as far as the gear I could see from the ground—40 feet or so, not quite up into the corner system.

On the first ledge at the base of the route I found a rope bag and a “mashed up” #4 Metolius cam. The cam looked as though it had been pulled through the crack. The trigger was pushed up against the cam head and the head itself was “chewed up.” With the stem slightly bent, it looked like it had taken a small amount of force before it popped. It was not in good working order. My guess is that it was the second piece to fail.

In between the .75 and the #8 Metolius, I found a damaged .5 Camalot lying in the crack. The .5 showed signs of great stress. It looked as though it was placed horizontally. The cam head was slightly mashed on one side, but the stem was bent over like a piece of elbow macaroni. The cable was crushed and frayed, showing signs of significant force spread out over the entire stem. It looked as though it was placed on top of and behind a blocky feature. The sling of the cam was frayed on the clip in end and looked as though it had been melted with a hot iron on the side that would have been in contact with the rock.

My guess is Colin lost his footing trying to clip his fifth piece and fell (possibly upside down) 20-25 feet onto the .5 Camalot. I’m not sure whether or not he collided with the rock before the placement failed or after, but given the amount of force the .5 Camalot looks to have taken, it suggests that it happened after, causing the rock around the placement to explode and fall down onto Colin. The #4 Metolius cam seems not to have held either, also due to rock quality. There was a significant amount scaring caused by rocks about the size of a soccer ball low on the route. Colin’s fall was then arrested by the #8 Metolius a few feet off the deck. All in all the fall was probably around 80-90 feet.

With all this said, here is what I think we can learn from this tragic accident. Always wear a helmet while climbing in the Gorge, try to use passive protection as much as possible around hollow or questionable rock features, and be extremely cautious of ledge-fall potential. (Source: From observations by Pat Goodman, a local climber)

FALLING ICE—FALL ON ICE

New York, Adirondacks, Poke-O-Monshine

Ice on the first pitch of the popular 160-foot climb “Positive Thinking” broke off Poke-O-Moonshine Friday and crashed to the ground, taking an Ontario climber with it.

Kevin Bailey (34) was about 135 feet up and anchoring himself to the east side of the mountain when the ice split and detached. His climbing partner, Jason Kuruc, also of Ontario, stood below with the belay device, waiting to begin his ascent. After the crash, Kuruc left the mountain to get help, and returned to assist emergency workers, who attempted cardiopulmonary resuscitation, but could not revive the man.

Eventually, Kuruc was taken to CVPH Medical Center in Plattsburgh where he was treated for minor injuries and released.

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For a majority of the winter, the 85-degree pitch on Poke-O-Moonshine has been stellar for climbing. Ed Palen, a guide for Adirondack Rock and River Guide Service, said more climbers than ever attempted the nearly vertical climb this year, which sits on a giant face of rock about a mile long.

“It looks like in two or three days it went from a lot of good ice climbing to not much at all,” he said, after hearing about the accident Friday evening. Palen said that with the number of climbers and the good conditions, he wasn’t surprised an accident occurred but didn’t expect anything tragic.

“The climb was very safe and good for the past three weeks,” said Palen, who’s guided it a handful of times in the past two weeks, to some clients who’ve been waiting years to get a piece of it. “I’ve never seen more people climbing than this year.”

“We were seeing some scary things this year,” he said. “They heard Positive Thinking was in and everyone was rushing to it.” He said warm, rainy days took a toll on the ice, which streaks down the mountainside, creating four or five different climbs for the year.

“It’s still the most sought after ice-climb in New York State,” Palen said. “People will drive six, eight, ten hours if they hear that it’s in. It’s still considered one of the best climbs and certainly the best-known climb in the Adirondacks. [It’s] something you aim your climbing career for.”

He said color, sound, and ambient air temperature all give clues as to whether a climb is safe or not. But Palen, active in the sport for more than 20 years, said the only way to know is through experience. “There are young climbers with braver attitudes...doing harder things earlier with not quite the experience in judgments,” he said. (Source: From an article by M’chelle Peterson)

VARIOUS FALLS ON ROCK, PROTECTION PULLED OUT, INADEQUATE PROTECTION, AND RAPPEL ERRORS

New York, Mohonk Preserve, Shawangunks

There were 29 incidents reported for 2002. More than half were injuries sustained from lead climbing. In eight of the leader falls, protection pulled out. In seven others, leaders were “run out” in that they had too much slack in the belay system, which resulted in long falls to ledges, impacting the cliff, or grounding out. In the four top-rope incidents, the climbers were injured because they made pendulum swings when they fell.