

FALL ON ROCK—HANDHOLD BROKE OFF

Kentucky and Tennessee, Big South Fork National River & Recreation Area

Shelly Buchanan (49) of Norris, Tennessee, was bouldering on the Twin Arches formation on the afternoon of November 11th when a handhold broke off from a rock causing her to fall in a horizontal position six feet to the ground. The impact fractured her pelvis in four places and caused bruising to her ribs. The caretaker of a nearby backcountry hostel reported the accident via cell phone and remained with Buchanan throughout the incident. Ranger/EMTs Jimmy Barna and Randy Scoggins, ranger/parkmedic Kevin Moses, and four volunteers from the park rescue team stabilized Buchanan, which included the administration of IV fluids and pain medication, and evacuated her via wheeled litter. A LifeStar Bell 430 helicopter took advantage of a five-minute window amidst deteriorating visibility and weather conditions to land and fly Buchanan to University of Tennessee Medical Center, where she was admitted in stable condition. (Source: Chief Ranger's Office)

Analysis

We don't get many reports from this area, so it is included to indicate that there are several climbing spots in this part of the south. This report was gleaned from the NPS Morning Report. (Source: Jed Williamson)

FALL ON ROCK, CLIMBING ALONE AND UNROPED

Maine, Camden, The Ramparts

I think of the accident described here as the case of the wet ladder. On March 17, my girlfriend's dog, Kaya, and I, Ryan J. Howes (22), went on a 1.0 mile hike to a local climbing area called "The Ramparts," in Camden, Maine. I have soloed here on many occasions. I know the climbs here well and have taught climbing as an Assistant Instructor for a college climbing class. My first climb of the day, called Natural History (5.7), was approximately 70 feet in length and was accomplished without difficulty to the rappel anchors. I rappelled off using a rope that I carried as a butterfly coil on my back while climbing.

The second climb was another story though! The Fireman's Ladder (5.6) is a corner that was wet in some areas because it had snowed the day before and the snow had melted. The thought did cross my mind that I was over confident, but I climbed anyway. As I approached the top at about 30 feet above the ground, I found myself on wet rock. I realized that I should down-climb and get off the climb. I now feel that continuing the climb would have ultimately kept me from writing this article.

While hanging off a hand jam in a wide crack, I turned 90 degrees away from the rock to wipe off my left foot with my left hand. During the rotation, the hand jam slipped and I continued to rotate free in the air and found myself facing outward while plunging down the vertical climb. After

falling about ten feet, I saw that I was going to smash into the rock, but kicked myself away from it using my right leg and foot. I hit the ground and landed on both feet, but apparently my left leg and foot absorbed most of the impact of stopping. The fall continued until I was on both knees and then my hands and stomach. At first I was simply shocked from falling that distance, but then pain began to increase, so that within 15 or 20 seconds I knew that I was not walking out of the climbing area. There was approximately one and one-half hours of daylight left.

I took my helmet off and replaced it with a warm hat. The dog, Kaya, knew that I was hurt and she stayed by my side as I crawled the mile back to the trailhead through a talus field and over two streams. The crawl out took an hour, during which I kept calling for help and was in pain. At the Trailhead, next to the road, a number of cars drove past without stopping until I raised my hand for help and the first motorist screeched to a stop, laying down tire rubber in the process. Earlier, in crossing the streams, I stayed relatively dry, but near the Trailhead I had to crawl through standing water, was shivering, and started to go into shock. The motorist called 911 and an ambulance came and took me to Pennobscot Bay Medical Center, where I was treated for soft tissue tears and snapped ligaments in my left ankle and foot. A specialist has indicated that I will completely recover in a surprisingly short eight weeks. If true, this will be a small price to pay for such a mishap.

Analysis

A friend gave me a number of issues of Accidents in North American Mountaineering containing summaries of accidents in the USA over the last 40 to 50 years. I found that my situation fit many of the leading causes or relationships to accidents, including my age group (21-25), moderate experience level, falling or slipping on rock, and climbing unroped, among others.

I now realized that soloing is very unpredictable, particularly when coupled with poor judgment. I have decided to climb with a partner or use a mechanical soloist device. Maybe my new decision to climb roped up and with a partner will keep me old, but perhaps not as bold.

(Editor's Note: Self-reports are the best! There was one other climbing-related accident in Maine this year, gleaned from the NPS Morning Report, though not counted in the data. Emil Lin, 21, of Hampden, Maine, drowned while attempting to retrieve a climbing shoe from the ocean below Otter Cliffs, one of the most popular local climbing destinations, which can be extremely treacherous during stormy weather and high tides. Lin had been at the base of the cliff when surf from the high tide washed his gear out into the water. Although the gear was attached to his climbing rope, his shoe came off and started floating away. Lin entered the 49-degree F water to retrieve it, only to be overpowered by both the cold water and high surf. After several attempts to climb back up onto the rocks, Lin went under and did not resurface.)