

He also had a blistered left foot, blackened toes, and remembers hearing a “popping” sound before going into unconsciousness. He said, “Last time I heard that sound, I was close to a lightning strike.”

Analysis

After putting the clues together, B hypothesized that he was zapped by what a friend described as a phenomena known as “ball” lighting. It apparently exhibits buzzing sounds but no flash and precedes storms. Late day thunderstorms are a common summer occurrence in North Carolina. Climbers can prepare themselves by getting an early start and recognizing the signs of a potential thunderstorm. Familiarization with the appropriate tactics and techniques to help mitigate potential lightning strike will also be helpful.

During the quick hike to the top of the route, I (Gary) began thinking that many of my partners and my own self-rescue skills have become rusty or lost due to disuse. I urge all traditional climbers to learn, practice, and keep these skills current. As climbers, we should be capable of rescuing ourselves or other climbers and not rely solely on local rescue services. The North Carolina Outward Bound School, however, is consistently competent and should always be contacted in the Linville Gorge area as they are one of the primary SAR groups in the vicinity. Their support that day is appreciated, as is the quick response of the Burke Co. EMS. (Source: Gary Butler, from a posting on the Carolina Climbers Coalition Website www.carolinaclimbers.org, August 13, 2004, Kristian Jackson, NCOBS, and Aram Attarian).

FALL OR SLIP ON ROCK, EXCEEDING ABILITIES

North Carolina, Pilot Mountain State Park

On September 5, Paul Bridges (PB) and Alex Rodriguez (AR) were rappelling in Pilot Mountain State Park, which is located approximately 25 miles north of Winston Salem. After both had rappelled several times during the morning, they decided to do a little “climbing.” Leaving their rappelling equipment behind, they moved down the trail to the base of the climbing area and began to free-solo an unknown route. As AR was attempting to move up onto a ledge, he lost his grip and fell a few feet to a ledge below injuring his ankles. After hitting this ledge, he tumbled down the rockface to the trail below, receiving additional injuries. PB believes AR fell approximately 12 to 15 feet.

Pilot Knob Fire Department, Pilot Mountain Rescue Squad, Surry County EMS and the Interagency High Angle Rescue Team all responded. AR was placed in a Stokes basket and hauled up the main descent gully. He was carried out and transported to the hospital, where his injuries were evaluated. He sustained two broken ankles, a fractured right tibia and fibula, broken and dislocated fingers and torn tendons on his left hand. He also cracked ribs and several stitches were required to close a head wound! As of September 10, AR has undergone several surgeries, and still awaiting more.

Analysis

Some of the terrain at Pilot Mountain looks relatively easy and for some presents the path of least resistance to the top of the climbing area. Both climbers had the equipment to set up a top-roped climb. Whether or not they had the knowledge is another story. (Source: Keith D. Martin, Pilot Mountain State Park Ranger and Aram Attarian)

FALL OR SLIP ON ROCK, PROTECTION PULLED OUT, FAILURE TO FOLLOW INSTINCTS

North Carolina, Table Rock, Talkin' 'Bout Mudflaps

During the morning of October 17, Jeff Pock (36) fell while climbing Talkin' 'Bout Mudflaps (5.11) causing his first piece of protection, a #3 stopper, to pull, resulting in a ground fall. He suffered two broken heels, a broken left foot and a broken left wrist.

Jeff mentioned that he and his partner and their girlfriends were on their way to climb Second Stanza (5.8). Jeff was leading the group to the start of the climb. He stopped beneath Talkin' 'Bout Mud Flaps to wait for his party to catch up. After arriving, his partner suggested that they climb Talkin' 'Bout Mud Flaps instead of continuing to Second Stanza, their intended climb. Jeff reluctantly agreed. Later, he commented that he had a bad feeling about the route and that he didn't feel comfortable with his decision, as he had a very limited amount of lead climbing experience, especially at this level of difficulty.

Jeff recalled starting the climb and missing clipping the first fixed anchor. He continued upwards and placed a stopper and in the process of placing a cam to backup the stopper he lost his footing and began to fall, the stopper popped. He remembers the sensation of being in mid-air, then striking the ledge below with his heels and doing a clean flip before hitting the ground. Joe mentioned that when the stopper popped, "It was the sickest sound I've ever heard."

Chris Rhyne and his partner who were climbing nearby, were first on the scene and with the help of Joe's party were able to evacuate him using a piggy-back carry. This was a difficult task, as the terrain and narrow climbers trail proved to be very demanding. After reaching the main Table Rock (TR) trail, the rescuers were able to do a two-person carry down to the TR parking lot and their vehicle. Joe was driven to Sloop Memorial Hospital in Crossnore, N.C., approximately one hour away where his injuries were assessed.

Analysis

Overall the climbers, with assistance, were able to initiate a self-rescue. The ability to be self-sufficient is a skill set that all climbers should have. Intuition is something that many of us, including climbers, possess. When intuition tells you that something doesn't feel right, heed its warning! (Source: Chris Rhyne, Joe Pock and Aram Attarian)