

This was only the eighth climbing-related fatality in the Shawangunks in the last 45 years. With an estimate of 10,000 climbers visiting this area each year for the past two decades and about 50,000 climbs being attempted annually, this means an extremely low fatality rate. (Source: From reports submitted by Mohonk Preserve)

**FALL OR SLIP ON ROCK, FAILURE TO FOLLOW ROUTE, FATIGUE, DARKNESS
North Carolina, Linville Gorge Wilderness, Shortoff Mountain, Paradise Alley**

On January 12, John Matthew (40) and Nathan Z. (30) both moderately experienced climbers, set off to climb Maginot Line (5.7) and Paradise Alley (5.8) on Shortoff Mountain, located at the south end of the Linville Gorge Wilderness Area. The following description of the events leading up to the incident is described by J. Matthews.

Nathan and I are both WFRs and he is an AMGA TRSM. I have taken the AMGA TRSM course, but have not passed the exam. We have both led groups of youth climbing. We both wear helmets. However, neither of us had been out climbing for a couple of months

We climbed Maginot Line easily and took some time at the top to enjoy the warm January day. By the time we reached the base of Paradise Alley, it was near 4:30 p.m., but we both had headlamps warm layers and felt solid so we set off. Nathan led the first pitch with some difficulty, hanging on the rope a couple of times but taking no falls. I seconded with some difficulty, attributed to mostly fatigue. At the top of pitch one, I consulted the guidebook and set off.

We were using the Lambert/Shull Guide, which marks the route as moving straight up from the belay (the Kelley Guide includes more detail and marks a short blocky scramble to the left before moving left). I climbed straight off the belay and pulled a small roof to gain the face. When I reached the face, I realized I was off-route because the rock was covered in lichen and the climbing difficulty seemed well beyond the 5.8 rating. I knew I needed to move left and I saw what appeared to be a good stance up and to the left. I placed a .3 C4 and started to move up and left towards the stance. I had gone approx 20 feet with protection when I came off the rock.

We were climbing with double ropes and as I fell, one of the ropes caught my leg and flipped me upside down. The total distance of the fall was about 40 feet. The C4 held. Nathan caught my fall, but was pulled upwards about eight feet. When the rope caught my weight, I did a pendulum swing into the rock. The impact was focused on my left shoulder.

By now it was dark. After an initial period of assessment (and a good amount of screaming and yelling), Nathan rigged the ropes to lower me and brought me to the ground. After cleaning the anchor and salvaging what gear he could, he joined me at the base of the cliff. Here, we assessed our options

for an evacuation. Our choices included calling for a rescue, bushwhacking to the river and hitting a gravel road, or ascending the approach gully and then hiking back to the car. We chose to ascend the gully because I was able to walk and we didn't want to bushwhack in the dark. The approach gully includes two fifth class sections. We made it to the first fifth-class section, an overhanging rock of approximately 20 feet in height. Nathan ascended the single fixed rope. At the top he built an anchor and rigged a 3:1 to haul me up the rock. About two-thirds of the way up the rock, two of the three anchor points blew and I slammed into the rock. I don't believe this caused any further injury, but it sure hurt like hell!

The second fifth class section went without incident. We hiked the remaining section of trail back to the car. The evacuation, from accident to vehicle, had taken approximately five hours. We drove to Mission Hospital in Asheville, where I was treated for a badly broken collarbone and a broken scapula, as well as a laceration on the elbow to the bone, a hematoma on the hip, bruised ribs, sternum, elbow, and ankle, and torn ligaments in the rotator cuff. The elbow and the hip were suspected to be fractured but x-rays proved negative. After follow-up assessment, the collarbone required reconstructive surgery with "bone putty", seven screws, and a six-inch titanium plate. As of September 1st, I am still in physical therapy, but returned to the rock two weeks ago—the first time since my accident.

Analysis

In hindsight, there were a number of things we could have done which may have prevented this accident. First, we should have been satisfied after climbing Maginot Line, and not starting a multi-pitch climb at 4:30 p.m. in January. Fatigue should have been a warning sign, suggesting to us that it would have been best to descend after completing the first pitch. When I realized I was off route and run out, I could have exercised caution and down-climbed, or I could have consulted more than one guidebook for route information, placed more protection, or stayed home and watched football! (Source: John Matthew)

Additional Comment: Linville Gorge is a remote area with very challenging terrain and access. Rescue is often difficult and demanding in time, manpower, and equipment. Both climbers did an excellent job of being self-sufficient and skilled in initiating a self-rescue. (Source: Aram Attarian)

SLIP ON ROCK – FAILURE TO TEST HOLDS, CAM PULLED OUT, PLACED INADEQUATE PROTECTION, EXCEEDING ABILITIES

North Carolina, Jackson County, Gray's Ridge

Chris Wilcox (35) and Scott Philyaw (52), both experienced climbers, had busy home and work lives that prevented them from getting out more than once a month at best, with rather longer periods of inactivity during win-