

my suspicions were confirmed.

Our friend, J, seconded the climb, but left the gear in place. I decided to lead it on the already placed gear, thinking that a 5.10a shouldn't be too much of a problem for me.

As I climbed, I only placed a single piece of gear. Rodney had placed a piece very deep, and it was difficult to remove (so) I replaced it. I should have been doing the same for all the other pre-placed pieces, removing each and placing them deeper in the crack. They were also a size too small, so the cams were too flared. I didn't have the proper gear or knowledge to fix the placements.

As I let go after asking for a take—with the mindset of a sport climber (my fifth mistake), the piece twisted, locked up, and tore away a chunk of rock as it tried to hold. The two pieces below also twisted and came out, though they didn't take as much rock with them. Final mistake: I wasn't wearing my helmet.

The luck I had that day bore these lessons into me like a laser:

- Wear a helmet! I don't care what you think of yourself or your self-image. You can fall. And you can hit your head. Do it.
- What you climb on sport lead doesn't translate to trad. Trad climbing is a different level of climbing that takes years to feel comfortable and even more to master.
- Know what you're doing. If you're climbing at your limit on trad, you had better know exactly what you're doing or you will pay the consequences. (Source: Gram Parker)

## **FALL ON ROCK, CLIMBING ALONE, FAILURE TO MAINTAIN CONTROL OF ROPE, UNFAMILIAR WITH DEVICE, NO BACK-UP, FATIGUE**

### **Nevada, Red Rock Canyon NCA, Tunnel Vision**

On February 4, a male climber had been rope soloing the 5.9 bolted first pitch variation to Tunnel Vision when he decided to retreat at the fourth bolt due to the pitch being harder than anticipated. When rappelling, he experienced difficulty with the device repeatedly "locking" and was trying to find a position on the lowering handle that would cause the rope to lower with less drag. (He was using a fairly new 60mx10.2 rope.)

He had placed the handle in the full open locked position and was trying to find a position in the handle range that he had used before to get a smooth descent. At some point, he took his hand off the brake side of the rope and began to use both hands to try and adjust the handle. There was no backup in place.

The device unlocked abruptly in mid range (between the locked open and closed handle positions) and the climber went into free fall of about 25 feet. He managed to grab the brake side of the rope, causing rope burns to his hand. The device then locked but during dynamic stretch of the rope, he impacted the ground feet first. He injured both

ankles. His left ankle was immediately unusable and the right ankle was also damaged to the extent that he could not place any weight on it a short time later. He was extremely fortunate to be in a rare position within Red Rock that had cell coverage and that he had chosen to bring his phone with him.

He waited about an hour before initiating rescue. The responding BLM ranger reached him about an hour later and after assessing the situation elected for a helicopter extraction. After assessment by EMT personnel, the climber chose to refuse further treatment and was picked up at the location by a friend. (The injuries turned out to be minor.)

### **Analysis**

The primary cause of the accident was that the climber failed to maintain control of the rope and utilize a backup. A backup should always be used when rappelling, especially when soloing. In addition, the climber's hand should not have been off of the brake side of the rope.

Other factors that contributed to this incident:

- Misjudgment of the route. The route was close to the climber's maximum lead capability under normal circumstances.
- The self-arrest device in use was an Edelrid Eddy and the climber had tried it only twice before.
- Exhaustion. The climber had considered retreating earlier in the climb but continued on. He was suffering both from physical stress and mental stress due to the grade of the route and climbing alone. (Source: Edited from a post on mountainproject.com by Travis Spalding, one of his climbing partners – hence no name and no age, we assume.)

## **FALL ON ROCK, INADEQUATE PROTECTION**

### **Nevada, Red Rock Canyon NCA, Pine Creek Canyon**

On March 12, around 1:00 p.m., there was a serious leader fall on the lower section of the third pitch (the long 5.8 corner) of the route Dark Shadows on the Mescalito Formation in the Pine Creek Canyon area. It seems that the leader was about 30 feet above the belay ledge with insufficient protection and slipped while trying to place gear. He dropped the gear and landed on the small ledge just above the belay right-side down. It does not appear that any gear failed.

There was one party above and one party below on the route. I was anchored just right of the Dark Shadows belay ledge at the anchor of Slot Machine (instead of rappelling to the Dark Shadows anchors). I saw about the last five feet of the fall. It was extremely disturbing.