

aid ascents on Looking glass and two ascents of El Capitan, he was, nevertheless, climbing alone. (Source: Jed Williamson)

FALL ON ROCK, RAPPEL ERROR

North Carolina, Rumbling Bald, Cereal Buttress

It was July 2, 10:30 a.m. I had met Joshua Haddock (29) only ten minutes before I heard his body impact the ground. Mike, Brian, his 15 year-old son Cole, and I had the Cereal Buttress to ourselves. It was still shaded and cool despite a forecast for the high 90s. Cole was leading Fruit Loops as a warm up. Two college-age guys walked by and we joked how we were surprised to see two other masochists climbing on a south-facing wall in July. They laughed, walked past us and started climbing a few routes away. A short while later Mike was top roping a climb, Cole was belaying, and Brian was taking pictures of Mike while on rappel.

I wandered over and started taking pictures of another climber, Lorenzo, as he cruised Frosted Flake (5.9). His belayer, JH, and I struck up a conversation about the area and its various access issues. After a few minutes I wandered back to my group. JH top roped their route. A few moments later we heard a frightening sound. Lorenzo called for help and I was at the scene within 30 seconds. JH lay crumpled at the base of the cliff beside a large embedded boulder.

Just five weeks earlier, I had taken a wilderness first aid class. I had hoped I would never have to use the knowledge I had gained but was suddenly grateful that I took the class. I yelled for my guys to get down now and call 911. Thankfully, Mike had a signal on his phone. I did a quick assessment. JH was in a fetal position, lying on his right side. He was alert and understood my questions. I realized within seconds we had a spinal issue because he could not move anything except his eyes. They were filled with fear but were still communicative. He could not feel me pinching him. His right thigh had an obvious deformity, and a look under his pant leg revealed an ugly compound fracture. There was little blood loss, though. Cole arrived next as he had lowered Mike to the ground. Brian wisely sent him, the nimblest among us, to run to the parking lot and lead the EMS crew to us once they arrived. The trail system to the Cereal Buttress is complicated and primitive. The last 200 yards involves boulder scrambling. The crew would have been greatly delayed without Cole's guidance.

Brian and Mike hurried to the scene once they were on the ground. At that time I noticed JH was turning ashen colored and his eyes no longer met mine. He had stopped breathing! Despite knowing he had a spinal injury, we had no choice but to straighten him out. We gently pulled his legs and torso away from the wall and got him on his back. Mike and Brian immediately began CPR. I elevated his good leg with a pack to get blood to his torso. I next began extracting him from the tangle of gear

and rope around him. I cut him out of his harness and got the cams he was lying on out from under him. I got on the phone with 911 again and gave them an update to relay to the crew. An odd thing is that the call was answered by Polk County 911 rather than Rutherford County.

The next people on the scene were Ricky and Brittany, two climbers who had met Cole on his way down. Soon thereafter the Chimney Rock Fire Department's first responders showed up and we lead them to JH. It took roughly 45 minutes from the time the call went out until the first professionals arrived. Based on our remote location I believe that was a very fast response.

During the interim, JH "died" on us several times. Brian and Mike heroically brought JH's heartbeat back several times using CPR. We all yelled encouragement to JH throughout. I believe he was fighting as hard as he could on the inside.

Once the pro's arrived we gave them all the info we could and got out of the way. We rested, cried, and regrouped. We knew JH was in good hands but also realized the ordeal was far from over. Once the crew had JH on oxygen and inserted an IV, we still had to transport him. Mike, Ricky, Cole and I scouted and cleared a lower trail through the heavily forested talus at the base of the cliff. We met the backboard team and helped them disassemble the stretcher, which had a large rubber tire beneath it for trail travel. The wheel was worthless on the immediate terrain but was awesome once we were later back on a real trail. Ricky ran down the mountain several times to assist in bringing oxygen tanks and IV bags up from lower, slower crews.

By the time JH was ready for transport, there were probably 25 people at the scene, all eager and willing to do whatever it took to get this man safely down the mountain. It was a slow, laborious process carrying a stretcher down the treacherous mountainside, especially now that the temperature had risen to above 90 degrees. The volunteers and the professionals worked well together and we eventually got JH down to the wheel at the start of the better trail. Once the wheel was attached, we made excellent progress to a waiting ambulance that whisked JH off to a helicopter waiting in town that in turn took him to Memorial Mission Hospital in Asheville, where doctors found that Joshua had a broken neck. They were unable to fully revive him.

Analysis

Mike and I hiked the mile back uphill to investigate the scene and lug our gear out. JH's rappel device was still attached to the rope, but only by a single strand. Frosted Flake has fixed rings at the top. After threading his rope through the rings, JH apparently failed to ensure that both strands of rope were on the ground before he commenced his rappel. The ends and middle of his rope were marked at the factory. He also failed to "close the system", which means tie a knot in the ends of the rope. Had there been a knot at the end of the rope, it could not have slid through his rappel device and this accident would not have happened. The pictures I took of Lorenzo earlier show that he wore a helmet. JH did not. Mike and I photographed the evidence, then gathered it up and trudged out. (Source: Edited from a report by Sean Coburn)

(Editor's note: This is from a post on the Alpinist Web site: "Doctors were able to save Haddock's heart, lungs, liver, pancreas and kidneys for five different donors. Upon hearing that four men and one woman had received Joshua's organs, his mother, Pamela Haddock, found some comfort in that her son's death was able to give life to five others.")

FALL ON ROCK, OFF ROUTE

North Carolina, Stone Mountain

On October 21, we approached the base of Stone Mountain to climb U-Slot (5.7) and then the Great Arch (5.5). On our way to the climb, I noticed two men moving rather slowly across the boulder field at the base of The Block Route and U-Slot. One of the men yelled down to me and the two other climbers I was with saying, "We need help! I had a bad lead fall."

All three of us immediately dropped our packs and made our way up to the party of two, expecting the worst. When we got to them, I began asking them questions about the fall and his injuries. Dan (age unknown), the climber who had fallen, was standing and trying to scramble down between the rocks and trees with his older brother trying to assist him. Dan's brother stated that he was a paramedic and they just needed a couple of people to help get Dan down to the field so they could get their vehicle. Dan was able to walk but only with assistance from three of us, as he was unable to fully weight his left foot. Dan had major abrasions and rock burn from sliding down the slab of Stone Mountain. The majority of his injuries were on his left side, including his hand, wrist, arm, hip, ankle, and foot. When Dan's brother arrived with the truck he helped bandage his left arm before they packed up and began the drive out. We encouraged that they seek medical attention but are unsure if they did.

Analysis

As we talked with Dan we found out that he had been climbing for a long time and knew Stone Mountain and Block Route very well but was fairly new to leading.

This is a reminder that all climbers should know and understand their limits, especially on lead, and to make sure you pay attention to the route so you don't stray off, even if you have been on it before. (Source: David Crye)

FALL ON ROCK, NO HARD HAT

North Carolina, Crowder's Mountain State Park, Opinionated

On November 23, a male climber (23) fell while climbing Opinionated (5.9+) on the Red Wall at Crowder's Mountain State Park. According to reports, the climber was attempting to clip the third of six bolts when he fell. Witnesses noted that the climber flipped backwards, fell approximately eight feet, and struck his face against the cliff face, fracturing his nose, then suffered a seizure and lost consciousness. The climber and his belayer were not wearing helmets.

Analysis

This same spot has been the site of three previous falls, all with the