

FALL ON ROCK, FATIGUE, PLACED INADEQUATE PROTECTION

New Hampshire, Cathedral Ledge

On May 17, 1986, Bob Michonwski (25) and Geoffrey Nichols (24) had spent a full day climbing and bouldering around Cathedral Ledge, and to end the day, they attempted the first pitch of Cathedral Direct (5.11). The route is a strenuous arm test that “left you hanging by your fingers.” Inching along a six meter horizontal crack, Nichols made it to the first piton. He clipped in and then moved further out, “feeling really burnt out.” He was attempting to clip into the second piton when he slipped and fell to the ground, landing on his left ankle and fracturing his tibia. (Source: Geoffrey Nichols)

Analysis

Follow the recommendations of the Guide (meaning the Guide Book) for pre-placement of protection before doing the route. Bob and I had felt strong and done several 5.11 moves and routes throughout the day. But we were tired at the end of the day, and it cost me all rock climbing until October. (Source: Geoffrey Nichols)

FALL ON ROCK, EXCEEDING ABILITIES, INADEQUATE EQUIPMENT, CLIMBING ALONE

New Hampshire, Cathedral Ledge

(Donald Estep [26] dictated this report regarding his accident on August 5, 1986.)

I had intended to do an ascender-protected (using a hanging rope for protection) solo ascent of Starfire, a 5.11 route on the south end of the east face of Cathedral Ledge. I approached the route from the top, fixed a rope hanging down Repo Man, a somewhat harder route which I mistook for Starfire, rappelled to a ledge 12 meters above the ground, fixed a Clog Ascender to the 11 millimeter rope with one locking Clog carabiner to my set harness and one locking Chouinard Reverse Gate D carabiner to my makeshift chest harness, consisting of two slings. I weighted the rope by tying my pack to the rope, and I started climbing.

The route was harder than I expected; I fell a few times (that is, I weighted the Clog Ascender) before the accident. My self-belay was working successfully. When I was 12 to 15 meters above the small starting ledge, I fell; my feet came off the 80 degree slab and my chest hit the rock and the Clog Ascender. My fall was not stopped by the ascender until I had fallen back almost to the starting ledge.

During the fall I grabbed the rope, thinking that it had come out of the ascender. (I had read that this was possible with a CMI Ascender.) My hands received severe second and third degree friction burns. (Skin was hanging in flaps from the fingers and palm of each hand.) I let go of the rope when I realized that the ascender was still on the rope; I rolled out of my face-to-the-rock position, and at that point the ascender caught me. My landing on the small ledge was soft because of the stretch in the rope.

The slings which made up my chest harness were abraded completely through. My seat harness was not injured.

Three other climbers assisted me by lowering me to the ground. (I could not use my hands.) I was able to walk to a car for the drive to the hospital. (Source: Donald Estep via George Hurley, Mountain Guides Alliance)