

FALL ON ROCK—HANDHOLD CAME OFF

New Hampshire, Cannon Mountain, Whitney/Gilman Route

On October 30, 1994, two students and a White Mountain School climbing instructor (37) were on the third “pipe pitch” on the Whitney/Gilman Ridge (5.7) on Cannon Mountain. The leader had been simal-belaying the two students on double 11 mm ropes and leading on one rope and clipping the second rope on every other piece of protection. The students were anchored with a cordelette off three pieces, and the student belayer was using a Sticht Plate on one of the 11 mm ropes with the second student being a hands on monitor to the belay.

The leader placed two pieces of protection below the “pipe” and clipped two of the three pins (first and third) above the “pipe” before stepping out right onto the sloped and exposed ledge of the North Wall about 50+ feet from the last belay. The leader reached up for a right handhold and snapped it off when he placed his weight on it and he was off. The student belayer had been through a WMS rock climbing course and was considered the technically more proficient of the two students. The student did not react to the rope running through his hands and the system. The leader took a straight fall for 60+ feet before the second student locked off the rope as he had been taught as a backup monitor.

The leader could see two major abrasions on the rope about 30 feet above him, but had no clue as to the large tear out of sight just below the carabiner 60 feet away. Fortunately, there was a second WMS group just starting the next pitch and their leader dropped another rope down for the dangling leader to ascend. The leader returned to the slope ledge inspecting the area for sharp edges.

The students were handling the situation well and were instructed to have the student on the bad rope tie a figure eight on a bight with a cow’s tail 30 feet out on the good rope and clip himself in with a locking biner. The students were in sight 50 feet below, and every step was checked and double checked before the student was told to untie from the bad rope. Both students were simal belayed on the one good rope to the ledge. The last student could not reach the biner/runner on the last pin and left it. The leader descended and retrieved the gear and for the second time checked the area again for sharp edges and still found none.

Analysis

The destroyed 11mm rope was a brand new Beal program rope and had only been used once the day before on a slab route. The leader took a 60 footer on 110 feet of rope in the system. We have concern that considering the severity of the damage to the belayed rope that it by itself would not have held the fall, considering that the second 11mm rope had to absorb some of the shock and friction, even though it was not in the Sticht Plate and only clipped through every other piece of protection. We can only attribute the damage to a carabiner. It is a miracle that the top pin held the impact. We were very lucky indeed to walk away without a scratch! **ROCK BREAKS—CHECK YOUR HOLDS!** (Source: Barry Jones)

VARIOUS FALLS ON ROCK, PROTECTION PROBLEMS, FATIGUE

New York, Mohonk Preserve Shawangunks

Fourteen incidents were reported in 1994, of which eight resulted in fractures or dislocations. There were two fatalities. One occurred when a man (47) slipped and fell 60 feet to