

## Analysis

I am 39 years old and I have been climbing since 1993, with regularity. The one time I spoke with my belayer afterwards, he said later he inspected the Gri-Gri, and he found the rivet to be loose. He suspects this was the cause. I am always very meticulous about double-checking everything, and I remember carefully checking to make sure the Gri-Gri was threaded properly. What went wrong? The Gri-Gri failed. My belayer got a huge rope burn from tightly clenching the rope, and he eventually got the device to lock-up. No bones were broken, and a prescription of Hydrocordon eased the pain, but some lessons were learned.

The more parts there are in a device, the more things that can go wrong. If dirt gets into the Gri-Gri while climbing, it can hinder some of the device's mechanisms. If latch gets snagged in the open position, the rope can slide through. If a part get worn, bent, or cracked, the weakness may not be visible.

No belay device is completely safe. But when I begin climbing again, after I quit limping, I will never again allow anyone to belay me with a Gri-Gri. (Source: Seamus Munroe)

*(Editor's Note: This is recorded as Equipment Failure, but it should be noted that I have not received any reports of this device failing until now. There have been reports of individuals using Gri-Gris "upside down," but there is a diagram drawn on the device now.)*

## RAPPELLED OFF END OF ROPE—NO KNOT AND MISCALCULATION, DARKNESS

### Utah, Zion National Park, Moonlight Buttress

On February 18, M. C. and D. G. (ages unknown) began an ascent of Moonlight Buttress (V 5.9 CI). They planned to climb three pitches to the "Rocker Block," fix lines to the ground, then finish the route the following day. As a result of a late start, they didn't get to the anchors until dark. M. C. fixed their first 60 meter rope and rappelled with the second 60 meter rope, stopping at the first set of anchors he came to and well before the end of his line. After fixing the second rope, he began his rappel, expecting to reach the ground. About 50 feet above the ground, he rappelled off the end of his rope. He hit the ground, losing consciousness for three to four minutes. D. G. then rappelled further down the first rope and fixed the second rope to the next set of anchors, continuing to the ground to assist M. C. Amazingly, M. C. suffered only minor bruises and scrapes and was able to walk away from the incident. The team did, however, retrieve their gear the next day and abandon their climb.

## Analysis

Darkness was clearly a factor in this incident, since M. C. could not see the next (correct) anchors on his first rappel nor could he see that his rope didn't touch down on his second. However, the accident could have been easily avoided had the topos been consulted, as many of them clearly show three distinct sets of anchors. (It is possible to reach the ground using three 50 meter ropes or two 60 meter ropes.) This combined with the fact that he had too much rope

left on his first rappel should have tipped him off to the fact that he was not at the correct anchors. Finally, a simple knot at the end of the rope would have averted the incident entirely. (Source: Tony Thaler, SAR Ranger, Zion National Park)

## **FALL ON ROCK—CAM HOOK CAME OFF, NO HARD HAT, INADEQUATE PROTECTION**

### **Utah, Zion National Park, Forbidden Wall**

On December 27, V. G. (25) and L. E. (20) obtained a backcountry permit to climb Moonlight Butte. Whether they couldn't find their intended route or changed their minds is unknown, but the two instead began an unnamed/unknown route on Forbidden Wall near the Temple of Sinawava. V. G. began by climbing a 200-foot pitch to a vegetated ledge. The two then hauled their bags and moved across the ledge to the base of their next pitch. V. G., the more experienced climber, began leading out on Leeper cam hooks. About 15 feet on the ledge, V. G. placed a cam, climbed another ten to fifteen feet and placed his second cam. About ten feet above his second cam, and again out on cam hooks, V. G. expressed concern to L. E. about his next hook placement, thinking it suspect. After several minute of tinkering with the placement, V. G. committed his weight to it and the hook blew. He fell more than 20 feet, flipping upside down and striking his head against the wall, losing consciousness. By tugging on the belay line, L. E. was able to reposition V. G. so that he leaned against the wall in a head-up orientation. L. E. then tied him off in place and escaped the belay to get help, using a second lead line tied off to a single cam anchor to rappel from. After scrambling down several hundred feet of scree and then talus, and then crossing the Virgin River, L. E. met another climber, G. A., on the canyon scenic drive. G. A. immediately drove to Zion Lodge and notified park dispatch of the incident while L. E. returned to the scene to assist V. G. Despite a very serious potential hazard, the Zion SAR team safely stabilized V. G., lowered him to the ground, and got him transported to the hospital where he remains in a coma as of this report.

### **Analysis**

Several factors come to light here. First, V. G. decided not to wear a helmet, while insisting the L. E. wear his, since he was the less experienced climber. Second, they were climbing an unknown route of undetermined difficulty. The established routes on Forbidden Wall are some of the hardest and least repeated in the park, some checking in at A4 and A5. The probable lack of sufficient gear likely contribute to the third factor: the question of why V. G. chose not to place reliable protection between the cam-hook he was on and the suspect hook that blew. Finally, L. E.'s failure to construct a safe rappel anchor was almost disastrous. After G. A. summoned help, he returned with L. E. to the belay ledge, ascending the fixed rope. Once Zion SAR team members arrived, G. A. rappelled the line to assist with rescue efforts. SAR team members then ascended the line. So at this point, the single cam anchor had been rappelled on twice and ascended on four times. Upon reaching the ledge, SAR Ranger