

FALL ON ROCK—HANDHOLD PULLED OUT, APPARENTLY FAILED TO TEST HOLD, OFF ROUTE, INADEQUATE PROTECTION

New Mexico, Sandia Mountain Wilderness, Muralla Grande

On May 8, two resident physicians set out to climb Warpy Moople (5.9-.10, III), an eight pitch, 816 foot route on Muralla Grande, one of the major formations in the Sandia Mountain Wilderness outside of Albuquerque. On the first pitch the leader placed a small TCU, and then began a mantle move approximately fifteen feet above the piece. The belayer recalls that the leader was off-route to the left of the climb. The leader was fully committed to the move when the rock he was mantling onto pulled out. He fell for thirty five to forty feet before his belayer caught him.

The leader fell backwards striking the right side of his body, but also hit the left side of his head hard enough to break the strapping system of the Ecrin Roc helmet and knock him unconscious for a moment. He suffered a severe concussion. He recalls, "I only remember eating burritos at the Frontier Restaurant and then waking up in my hospital room...not even the emergency room."

His partner attempted to call for a help on his cell phone, but the increasing amount of radio frequency radiation emitted from Sandia Crest renders cell phones and two way radios almost useless, so they were unable to use the phone for several hours. The belayer lowered the leader and was able to help him walk out. He finally reached 911 by cell phone three hours after the incident and local rescue resources were activated but were not needed because the two men were able to hike out without assistance. (Submitted by J. Marc Beverly, PA/Paramedic, Albuquerque Mountain Rescue Council)

Analysis

There are some tantalizing details missing here, but there seems to be a basic message: Test your holds. Last year, a disproportionate number of "handhold (or foothold) came loose" incidents were reported. It also seems that more than a small TCU should have been considered to protect the first moves.

A side-bar is the comment relating to the victim's short term memory: Personally, I hope my last memory is a little more exciting than eating burritos. (Source: Jed Williamson)

(Editor's Note: Warpy Moople claimed the lives of three climbers in 1996, the day before a National Forest closure due to extreme fire danger. See ANAM 1997)

FALL WHILE DESCENDING—INADEQUATE EQUIPMENT (CLIMBING ROPE, RAPPEL DEVICE, HARNESS, BRAIN CELLS)

New Mexico, Jemez Mountains, Yoyo Pit

On May 16, a man and his girlfriend were on an excursion in the Santa Fe National Forest, which had been closed due to extreme fire danger. Yoyo Pit is a popular spot for vertical rope work as the pit is straight vertical until about half way down where it bells-out and turns to complete free-hang. Formed by a large gas bubble while the volcanic flow was cooling it is approximately thirty feet in diameter and has much loose rock.

The man apparently dropped his cell phone into the 170-foot pit. He decided to get some equipment from his vehicle and rig a descent with a tow rope, a come-along, a pulley, and two ropes not rated for rope work of any kind. The tow-rope was girth hitched to a sturdy tree and the come-along was wrapped once around the tree and clipped back to itself near the end of the tow rope. This is where he had a pulley clipped to the come-along with the descending rope running through the pulley. The tie-off was with five half hitches and then the rope went down into the abyss. The end of the first rope was tied to the second rope in order to reach the bottom. The two ropes were tied together with a series of half-hitches.

The man told his girlfriend that he knew what he was doing and that he had done this type of thing before. He used two sets of gloves to grasp the rope with but did not have a harness of any sort and did not use any sort of friction device to slow his descent. He merely went hand over hand down into the pit, according to his girlfriend. She also said he made it about half way down before the bell of the bottom (estimated at approximately seventy to eighty feet), and then he lost his grip and fell backwards. She reported that he was laughing on the way down.

After he hit the bottom he apparently continued to laugh and stated that he thought he broke his arm. A minute later he said he could not move and could not feel his back, that all was numb. The girlfriend went for help to Santa Fe since there was no cell phone. She managed to get to a pay phone to call 911. Fire Department and Search and Rescue were activated. By the time rescue personnel made it to the scene the man had died.

There were rope burns on the man's gloves and his arms. He had bilateral leg fractures, a broken arm and died from internal injuries, either internal hemorrhage or neurogenic shock. (J. Marc Beverly, PA/Paramedic, Albuquerque Mountain Rescue Council)

Analysis

While this is not considered to be a "legitimate" climbing accident, it illustrates how quickly people with no experience can get in trouble trying to become climbers. In addition to the technical mistakes here, it seems this fellow appears to have been a few tools short of a full box.

Unfortunately, the press will portray an incident such as this as proof that climbing is a dangerous sport. (Sources: J. Marc Beverly, PA/Paramedic—Albuquerque Mountain Rescue Council, and Jed Williamson)

FALL OR SLIP ON ROCK

North Carolina, Pilot Mountain State Park

On Friday, February 22, I (J.W. Peterson) was walking along the cliff top when I heard Brian Zimmerman (20) yelling and sliding down the rock face below the Ledge Springs Trail. I called to the climbers on the trail below and asked them if anyone was hurt. Chris Jones (20) called back and said, "Yes," that Brian had sustained a head and neck injury, and a broken leg. From my vantage point above, I could see Jones administering first aid to Zimmerman. I left the scene to call 911. My call informed me that Surry