

## **FALL ON ROCK—RAPPEL ERROR, NO BELAY OR BACK-UP, INEXPERIENCE**

### **North Carolina, Pilot Mountain State Park**

On March 15, Russell Page (22) was participating in a rappel training exercise near one of the access gullies, west of the Amphitheater. He was with a group of EMS/Firefighters from Forsyth Community College (NC) when he fell to the ground below.

The instructor, Mike Maher, also a witness to the accident stated that the group of ten students had just completed the instructional section of their training when Russell was beginning to rappel. According to Maher, Russell “panicked” as he went over the cliff edge, lost control, and fell approximately 40 feet to the rocks below, landing head-first.

Two members of the group went to the parking lot, a short distance away to call 911. Since most of the participants in the group were EMTs or Paramedics, first aid was started immediately. Russell was semi-conscious throughout the incident and was described as “combative” by rescue personnel. Even though he was wearing a helmet, the length of the fall combined with his body weight of 240 pounds caused his helmet to collapse, resulting in a severe skull fracture.

He was evacuated by Pilot Knob Rescue through a high angle rescue and transported via helicopter to Wake Forest Medical Center in Winston Salem, NC. He is expected to recover.

### **Analysis**

According to the Park Superintendent who was on the scene, Russell was not belayed. When the instructors were asked about this, their reply was that they didn’t use one because Russell had rappelled before, and that they were not using any back-up systems for any students.

It is standard practice for individuals participating in any organized or sponsored climbing and/or rappelling activity be belayed, either by a separate belay rope (by a prusik loop attached to the climbers leg harness loop), or at the least using a “fireman’s belay.” Being surrounded by a group of EMTs and Paramedics and wearing a helmet may have been the contributing factors that saved Russell’s life. (Source: Andy Whitaker, Pilot Mountain State Park and Aram Attarian)

## **AVALANCHE**

### **New Hampshire, Canon Mountain, Black Dike**

Two climbers were up to attempt the Black Dike in the beginning of April. They weren’t really thinking about the possibility of an avalanche. It’s not clear how often anyone thinks of that small gully sliding. In retrospect all the ingredients were there. Perfect slope angle, heavily wind loaded lee slope, and lots of fresh faceted powder. TP always tried to hug the wall a little bit near the Whitney-Gilman (left), just in case, and he was a bit near it this day, just not enough evidently. For some reason when they cleared the trees and got about fifty feet from the rescue cache, TP took off his pack and put on his helmet. There was a lot of unfamiliar ice up on the cliffs from the recent