

for an evacuation. Our choices included calling for a rescue, bushwhacking to the river and hitting a gravel road, or ascending the approach gully and then hiking back to the car. We chose to ascend the gully because I was able to walk and we didn't want to bushwhack in the dark. The approach gully includes two fifth class sections. We made it to the first fifth-class section, an overhanging rock of approximately 20 feet in height. Nathan ascended the single fixed rope. At the top he built an anchor and rigged a 3:1 to haul me up the rock. About two-thirds of the way up the rock, two of the three anchor points blew and I slammed into the rock. I don't believe this caused any further injury, but it sure hurt like hell!

The second fifth class section went without incident. We hiked the remaining section of trail back to the car. The evacuation, from accident to vehicle, had taken approximately five hours. We drove to Mission Hospital in Asheville, where I was treated for a badly broken collarbone and a broken scapula, as well as a laceration on the elbow to the bone, a hematoma on the hip, bruised ribs, sternum, elbow, and ankle, and torn ligaments in the rotator cuff. The elbow and the hip were suspected to be fractured but x-rays proved negative. After follow-up assessment, the collarbone required reconstructive surgery with "bone putty", seven screws, and a six-inch titanium plate. As of September 1st, I am still in physical therapy, but returned to the rock two weeks ago—the first time since my accident.

Analysis

In hindsight, there were a number of things we could have done which may have prevented this accident. First, we should have been satisfied after climbing Maginot Line, and not starting a multi-pitch climb at 4:30 p.m. in January. Fatigue should have been a warning sign, suggesting to us that it would have been best to descend after completing the first pitch. When I realized I was off route and run out, I could have exercised caution and down-climbed, or I could have consulted more than one guidebook for route information, placed more protection, or stayed home and watched football! (Source: John Matthew)

Additional Comment: Linville Gorge is a remote area with very challenging terrain and access. Rescue is often difficult and demanding in time, manpower, and equipment. Both climbers did an excellent job of being self-sufficient and skilled in initiating a self-rescue. (Source: Aram Attarian)

SLIP ON ROCK – FAILURE TO TEST HOLDS, CAM PULLED OUT, PLACED INADEQUATE PROTECTION, EXCEEDING ABILITIES

North Carolina, Jackson County, Gray's Ridge

Chris Wilcox (35) and Scott Philyaw (52), both experienced climbers, had busy home and work lives that prevented them from getting out more than once a month at best, with rather longer periods of inactivity during win-

ter ski season and summer rains. Scott also had some wilderness medicine training in his background. Chris describes their misadventure as follows:

Neither of us had experience in establishing new routes, but over the previous year, we were increasingly drawn by the lure of exploring some un-touched rock faces in eastern Jackson County. One cliff in particular caught our fancy, so in the second half of 2007, we twice scouted Gray's Ridge, which forms the high, northwest side of Wolf Creek Gorge in the Little Canada section of Jackson County. At its highest, the southeast-facing cliff is about 450 feet, broken by at least one major, wooded ramp. The approach is a strenuous bushwhack and there were no visible signs that it had ever been climbed. Finally on March 9th, we got a late start and made the roughly one hour approach on National Forest land, across a steep, choked tributary to Wolf Creek, then up and to the southwest to a likely looking jumping off point by approximately 1330.

Scott offered me the honor of first lead, which I to accepted. I opted to leave my new bolt kit on the ground as the possibilities for protection on the first pitch looked good. I headed up on solid but dirty 5.6-5.7 terrain and placed a couple of secure cams roughly ten and 15 feet off the ground. The climbing for the next 40 feet remained easy on solid-seeming rock that gradually got more thickly covered with lichen as the angle rolled off to a ledge where I intended to belay. My two pieces of protection in this interval were small cams (the last, I think, was a 0.5 Trango cam), but they were the only placements I could find and were in two short, flaring, downward facing cracks, maybe 25 and 35 feet off the ground.

Despite sensing that the last piece was just "psycho-pro," I moved up another five to ten feet onto lichen-covered footholds as the angle of the rock face slackened. I over-committed to one of these untested footholds and it popped off. I slid, pulling out my top two placements. My right leg struck the ledge that made the stance for the first pieces of protection and I flipped end-over-end, striking my helmet. I believe the top two pieces of protection (which failed), and the strike on the ledge absorbed some of the energy of what amounted to a fifty-foot slide/tumble.

When I came to a stop maybe ten feet down the steep slope from the base of the rock, Scott was below me urging me not to move. My only obvious and serious injury was an open tib/fib fracture. A self-evacuation was out of the question. My injury, coupled with the late hour and the steep/choked nature of the surrounding terrain, necessitated a technical rescue involving outside resources.

We tried several times to get a cell phone signal with no luck. Before Scott hiked out to summon help, he applied traction and supported my leg as I moved in a crab walk to a more level spot and on top of a rope tarp. He used my plastic latrine trowel and gauze and cling wrap to improvise a

splint. Scott then made sure I had put on all our spare outer-layers including a stocking cap under my helmet. I loaded up on Ibuprofen and settled in to feed, hydrate, and watch the clock. Scott left me at 1510. By 1545, he had retraced our approach, flagged down a passing motorist, and caught a ride to a house to place a call to 911.

Members of the Little Canada Fire Department were familiar with the terrain and responded within a short time, meeting Scott back at the trailhead to where he had returned. The whistle I keep in my shell helped the first member of the Jackson County Rescue Squad on rappel to find me quickly. The incident commander sent another squad member and a paramedic down the same line. Rescuers outlined the options being planned above. Although the Rescue Squad was trained and equipped for a haul up the cliff, complex terrain with loose rock and interspersed with heavy vegetation combined with the late hour caused the incident commander to request the aid of a helicopter.

At 1810 the heli-team was overhead, performing a recon/assessment. Two team members lowered through the forest canopy and directed the ground-based rescuers in packaging me for hoist and transport. By 1845 I was transferred into a ground ambulance at the Jackson County Airport. In the final assessment my injuries included a highly comminuted pilon fracture of the tibia, an open fibular fracture, a cracked calcaneus, and chipped patella. I sprained the medial and lateral cruciate ligaments and scuffed the meniscus in my right knee.

Analysis

While the technical difficulty of the rock I encountered was within my ability, I should probably have pushed up through the grades a bit more before turning my attention to unexplored rock. I would also have benefited from more frequent repetition of my leading skills. My complete lack of experience in establishing new routes also contributed to the length of my fall. I did not clean the features in which I placed protection and I left our bolt kit on the ground.

Probable factors in this latter decision include unfamiliarity with use of the hand-drill, and a reluctance to place bolts from stances near what “looked like” good natural protection. In retrospect, I should have down-climbed and retrieved the bolt kit. Also, I could have prevented the fall by being more methodical in testing my foot placements before committing full weight to them. (Source: Scott Philyaw)

FALL OR SLIP ON ROCK, INADEQUATE BELAY, INEXPERIENCED

North Carolina, Looking Glass Rock

On May 8, a male climber (31) and his female partner were attempting an unknown rock climb when he fell and broke his ankle. It was broken on both