

Upon hitting the ledge I felt no pain, did a self-assessment, and determined that I was physically ok but for an odd looking right ankle. Within a few seconds, my right ankle opened with an 8-inch long, 4-inch laceration that I assumed to be a compound fracture. I shouted down to my climbing partners that I had a compound fracture and that they should call 911. I then tied myself off to the bolt on the ledge and used a bandana and first aid materials to wrap my bleeding right ankle. Greg, belayed by Mike, climbed to my aid and rendered additional first aid. Michael remained below on the phone with rescue personnel and directed the Alpine Search and Rescue (ASAR) team out of Evergreen Colorado to the ledge when they arrived.

ASAR sent up a climber and a medic. The climber rigged a top-roped rappel and the medic rendered additional first aid and did further assessment of my injury. I descended on a tandem rappel with the medic. Upon standing up to rappel, the pain hit me in earnest. I was evacuated to an ambulance over steep and difficult terrain by the outstanding, hardworking, and heroic volunteers of ASAR.

I ended up with a fractured heel. The laceration was unrelated to the fracture and appears to have resulted from my climbing shoe rubber sticking hard on the ledge as my foot continued to move. End result of the injury is an internal fixation of the comminuted fracture of the heel with eight screws and a titanium plate, a full month in the hospital, and months of rehab yet to come.

Analysis

Always get protection in quickly when climbing above a ledge, especially when trying to make a relatively easy climb more interesting! (Source: Matthew Y. Biscan, Denver, CO)

FALL ON ROCK, PLACED INADEQUATE PROTECTION, PROTECTION PULLED OUT, EXCEEDING ABILITIES

Colorado, Clear Creek Canyon

Sept. 13th. It was a beautiful day for climbing. Michelle (24) and I (29) drove out to Clear Creek Canyon to hone our fledgling lead skills. We were both cautious, yet eager climbers with moderate skill. decided to climb Mounty, a 5.7 trad route. The beta we had gotten from mountainproject.com had indicated that the pro was small but solid. Although I wasn't a very experienced trad leader (I had only lead trad 8 or 9 times before this route), I was a confident 5.7 climber, so I wasn't very worried about the small pro. We were on a ledge, so I built a belay anchor for Michelle before starting up. After 25 feet of climbing, I had only found placements for three small pieces: two nuts and a #1 (blue) mastercam. I clipped the rope through the carabiner attached directly to the mastercam's integrated sling. At this point, I found that I had gotten a bit off-route and traversed a bit up and to the

left to get back on to the main crack. When I reached the main crack, I was not feeling very good about the amount of pro I had in and I was anxious to get in another piece before climbing higher. I had difficulty finding a placement. I wasn't comfortable continuing the climb without more pro, so I decided to down-climb. It turns out that being a confident 5.7 climber doesn't translate into being a confident 5.7 down-climber. While I was traversing down and to the right, back towards the blue cam, I slipped. The cam pulled out, and the two nuts were too low to catch me, so I hit the ground. I sustained an ulna fracture at the elbow and a fifth metacarpal fracture, but I was otherwise fine. Michelle made a sling for my arm, we hiked out, and she drove me to the hospital.

Analysis

Several mistakes were made that led to this accident. The biggest mistake was leading a route that was not well protected as a beginning trad leader. I knew from my research online that the route was not easily protected, but I decided to climb it anyway. My second mistake was that I didn't turn around earlier when I had trouble in the beginning finding placements. My third mistake was clipping the cam's integrated sling before changing the direction of the climb, instead of clipping a runner. It's possible that rope-drag could have caused the cam to walk and the placement to worsen. My fourth and fifth mistakes were overestimating my down-climbing abilities and not practicing down-climbing frequently enough while top-roping. (Source: Sent in with no last name)

INADEQUATE BELAY, CLIMBER LOWERED OFF END OF ROPE, INADEQUATE EQUIPMENT – ROPE TOO SHORT

Colorado, Clear Creek Canyon, Highlander Crag

On December 20, 2009, a 35-year-old man climbing with his girlfriend fell 20 to 25 feet. They were climbing in Clear Creek Canyon on Herb-a-Veg-A-Matic. Joe Pierzchala, climbing on a nearby route, witnessed the fall and gives this account:

The climber was being lowered after having led the route, draws still in place. Suddenly he was free falling! After lowering my partner, we observed the climber tied into his end of the rope, but that the belayer's end was now 35-40 feet up the route. We concluded that the climber was lowered off the end of the rope. We checked the guidebook, which indicated that the route was 102 feet in height, and concluded that the party must have been using a 50m rope. The fall distance corresponds to the distance a 50m rope would have come up short. The fallen climber landed on his back, narrowly missing a very large rock that could have caused more serious injuries. It appeared that the climber did land on a smaller rock, however, which likely caused injury to his back/pelvis/hip.