

rope, the other a non-climbing rope purchased from a box store (origin or type unknown). Both ropes were anchored for a rappel.

Both climbers were wearing climbing harnesses. Jane was attached to the box store rope with a prusik loop. The prusik was constructed out of a “shoe lace” looking cord (i.e. not designed for climbing) and attached to her harness with a carabiner. She was not using a belay/rappel device. John was attached to the second rappel rope with the rope running through a carabiner attached to his harness. He had no belay/rappel device.

The couple moved to the edge of the cliff to begin their rappel with their backs to the fall line. Based on an examination of the scene, it appeared that Jane fell first while “rappelling” and landed on a four-foot wide rock shelf approximately 40 feet from the top and 15–20 feet from the ground. John went down to help her and then fell to the ground about 60 feet below.

Both climbers were discovered with burns on their hands. John suffered two leg fractures (one an open fracture) and Jane had a broken wrist and a spinal injury.

Analysis

This accident speaks for itself. Both individuals had no business attempting to rappel with no knowledge, inadequate equipment, and experience. Upon inspection, Jane’s “prusik” along with the sheath of her rope melted, causing her to lose control. Chances are if she had let go of the prusik sooner it may have prevented her from serious injury. John never had a chance. His burns were a result of his hand being the sole friction device on the rope. He may have forgotten to wrap the spine of his carabiner to create a carabiner wrap (common in military rappelling) in his haste to aid Jane. Rappelling presents a unique set of dangers that aren’t found in other forms of climbing. A functional belay rappel device, a backup system utilizing an autoblock or similar friction knot and the knowledge on how to use it along with the proper equipment may have prevented this unfortunate incident. (Source: K. Delap and A. Attarian)

FALL ON ROCK, OFF-ROUTE

North Carolina, Blue Ridge Parkway, Shiprock

The three of us had been climbing since late morning on September 4. It was now early evening and two of us decided to try an unnamed route described to us by a climber we met on our previous trip to Ship Rock. We checked out the features and picked out the route as best we could from the ground. I geared up and began climbing. The first part of the climb involved a juggy, run-out section up some blocks and over a small bulge to the base of a low angle slab. The slab offered plenty of protection, so I geared up for the roof above me. After placing good gear near the lip of the roof, I pulled over it without much difficulty and placed what would be my final piece, a

BD #2 nut, in a bottleneck six feet or so above the roof.

At this point the climb thinned out into a featureless face route for the remaining 15 to 20 feet of the climb. From the beta I had on the route, I knew to the left of my route was a route a grade harder and to the right was a route two grades harder, so I figured the path of least resistance was the route I was on. I continued up and slightly to the left where I saw the most features. As I continued up, more features became apparent on the rock, and after climbing through the majority of the blank face, I came to realize I had split off onto the route to my left, a full grade harder and more run-out than my anticipated route. I stayed calm and took a quick look around, eyeing what looked like a fairly deep three-finger pocket at the very edge of my reach that, if I could get a hold of, would get me through the run-out section to good protection above me. Realizing I had no other options, I committed to the hold hoping for the best. The hold was much shallower and more sloped than anticipated—not enough for my pumped out fingers to clinch onto.

The first 12–15 feet of the fall was air. I began to think everything was going to end smoothly until I realized I was passing my last piece. Remembering the low angle slab below me, I braced for impact. Initially I landed square on my right heel, then fell sideways and onto my left side.

After explaining what I did wrong and how I got off route to my partner, I sat down near the base of the climb for a while until my partner led the correct pitch and cleaned the gear. With their help, I limped down the short approach trail to the Blue Ridge Parkway and waited by the side of the road for my ride. The damage: a fractured heel bone, a cracked rib, and plenty of scrapes and bruises, but I live to climb another day.

Analysis

Always climb within your limits and, though I didn't hit my head, wear a helmet! (Source: Will Chirico)

FALL ON ROCK, ROPE PULLS THROUGH BELAY DEVICE

North Carolina, Hawksbill Mountain, Linville Gorge Wilderness

On September 20, AG (26) and AA (30) were climbing at the “Fischesser Wall,” a little known sport climbing area on the upper wall of Hawksbill Mountain located on the eastside of the Linville Gorge Wilderness. AG was leading a 5.8+ climb with AA belaying. They were using a 60-meter rope and were both wearing helmets. The topo of the climbing area notes the climb is 100 feet long, making a 60-meter rope adequate. AG climbed it clean and was being lowered by AA. AG was cleaning the bolt closest to the ground and asked AA how much rope she had left. He replied it was fine. At 2:45 p.m., just after AG cleaned the last piece of gear, AG was lowered off the end of the rope and fell to the ground.