

primary methods of backup for preventing mistakes or loss of control include tying a knot on the end of the rope or using a Prusik or other friction knot attached to the rappel rope and the climber's harness. Better communication between Jones and his partner (or vice versa) may also have prevented this accident, especially since his partner was inexperienced. (Source: Bill May and Aram Attarian)

FALL ON ROCK, BELAYER TAKES HAND OFF ROPE

Kentucky, Red River Gorge

On Friday, March 4, I (name and age not on post) was climbing at The Motherlode on a route called Kick Me in the Jimmie (5.12) when I fell late in the day. The last fall of the last climb of the day should have been a routine, clean ~12-foot leader fall onto the fifth bolt. After the expected catch passed, it became clear that my belayer didn't have control of the rope. I fell about 35 feet to the ground.

I remember bracing myself for impact, hitting the ground, and letting everyone know that I was okay about one second after I hit. I injured my ankle and my butt hurt. I was able to walk out just fine. The belayer had rope burns on the wrist of his non-brake hand.

Analysis

My belayer had been climbing for ten years and I'd been climbing with him for just over a year. He was belaying with a tube-style device similar to a Wild Country VC Pro.

From what we could gather, he took his brake hand off the rope for a split second while moving into a better position to catch the fall. Once he realized his hand wouldn't be able to get the rope, he tried compressing it by leaning forward and just pressing his forearms onto the device/rope and in the process received rope burns on his forearm.

Relying on the belayer now is mentally difficult for me. I tried climbing on the following Sunday and Monday. Even being lowered is terrifying if I start to accelerate even a little bit. If this accident had been with an inexperienced belayer, I could have blamed myself, finding fault with trusting a "beginner" belayer. But now, considering that someone with ten years of experience dropped me, I have gotten in the mindset of, "How can I really trust anyone?" My plan is to go to the gym and practice taking larger and larger falls until I can get back to my old self. Please stay alert while you're belaying. It's your only job. (Source: Edited from a post on rockclimbing.com)

FALL ON ROCK, POOR COMMUNICATION, INADEQUATE BELAY – DISTRACTED

Kentucky, Red River Gorge, Muir Valley

On March 21, I took a lead fall, landing at the base of the climb Suppress the Rage (5.12a) located at the Sunny Side. I was at the

second-to-last bolt when I decided to rest before making the last hard move. I must admit that I started climbing kind of suddenly, maybe surprising my belayer. Anyway, when I was less than one meter above the bolt I fell off. Before I had time to realize what was happening, I found myself screaming and hitting the ground with my right leg and then my butt. Fortunately the rope got tight at the very last second, so I didn't fully impact the ground. But still, I broke my pelvis and two vertebrae.

Analysis

Here is why I think this happened. First of all, my belayer got distracted as soon as I decided to rest for a few seconds. I saw him talking with people while I started falling. Second, there was too much slack in the rope, because it doesn't make sense to take a 12-meter fall, when you're only one meter above the bolt. Third, he told me that, as soon as he realized I was falling, he grabbed the rope above and below the Grigri, compromising its activation.

The moral is to pay attention to what you are doing. Always confirm that your belayer knows how to belay properly. The Grigri can be a deceiving belay device to use for the inexperienced. Some think it works by itself and don't pay attention to how it functions in the correct way!

I've been climbing for more than ten years and consider myself to be experienced. This was the first time climbing with this person, so we didn't know each other well enough, and there was probably lack of communication. It wouldn't happen to me with my usual climbing mates. (Source: Edited from a report by Francesco Peci)

FALL ON ROCK, PROTECTION PULLED OUT, INADEQUATE PROTECTION Kentucky, Red River Gorge, Muir Valley

On April 22, a male climber (40) was nearing the top of a short dihedral on a trad route called "Short and Sweet" (5.7), located at the Practice Wall. He took a lead fall, causing his upper protection pieces to pop out, causing him to hit the ground. He sustained a crushed vertebra. He was carefully packaged onto a spine board, placed in a litter, and delivered to an awaiting helicopter.

Analysis

This accident was caused by tenuously placed gear. The climber commented that he should have put in more pieces. (Source: Rick Weber)

FALL ON ROCK, INEXPERIENCE, FAILED TO THREAD ROPE THROUGH ANCHORS

Kentucky, Red River Gorge, Muir Valley

A male climber (31) fell from the top anchors of Rat Stew (5.10a). He landed two feet from his belayer after free falling approximately 75 feet.

Moments after he decked, another climber who witnessed the fall ran