

more popular climbing areas in the Eastern U.S. with more than 30,000 visitors in 2011. Muir's seven miles of cliff line attract climbers from all over the world to its 350+ sport and trad routes. Rick and Liz Weber founded Muir in 2004 when it was opened at no charge to the public.)

FALL ON ROCK, PROTECTION PULLED OUT - POORLY PLACED, EXCEEDING ABILITIES, NO HARD HAT

Kentucky, Red River Gorge

On October 22, my group and I (Gram Parker – 40) were climbing in the Long Wall area of Red River Gorge attempting Rock Wars (5.10a, trad). I was approximately 60 feet up when I became unsure of my feet. Deciding I needed a rest, I asked for a “take” a few feet above the last piece I had clipped. Feeling uncomfortable about trying to down climb the layback finger crack and thinking of the climb in more of a sport lead mentality, I let go, trusting that my belayer had pulled in enough slack and therefore I wouldn't fall that far below it.

I felt the piece catch, and then I started to fall again. My only thoughts were, “Okay, the piece came out, maybe the next one will hold. Nope. Maybe the third.” And then I was on the ground, lying on my back. I looked up and said, “I'm okay! I'm okay!” This was really only meant to convey that I was conscious, and that I hadn't hit my head or injured my neck.

Everyone rushed to my side, asking if I was hurt and telling me not to move. I wasn't planning on it, at least not until I could get a better idea of what had happened and what, if any, injuries I had sustained. In the midst of responding, the pain in my ankle spiked and I could tell my back hurt in more than a few places.

Luckily, a member of a group climbing nearby was an ICU doctor and was able to check me out before the EMTs arrived. He also gave me some ibuprofen to help with the pain. The first EMT on the scene was part of the helicopter crew that would take me to the University of Kentucky's ER. He ran an IV and administered pain medications through it. He also put me in a neck brace, just in case. Once the team arrived, I was placed on a backboard, strapped down, and placed in a basket and carried for three hours in darkness to an ambulance that transported me to a waiting helicopter.

Analysis

That's the story of what happened. The story of how it happened is another thing entirely. My friend, Rodney, decided he wanted to lead Rock Wars. So, he did. His experience with trad climbing was not extensive. His placements were poor. I could see this as he climbed the route, though I only noted that he didn't place gear with respect to the direction of load. I should've said something. After his climb, I did ask the most experienced member of our group about his placements, and

my suspicions were confirmed.

Our friend, J, seconded the climb, but left the gear in place. I decided to lead it on the already placed gear, thinking that a 5.10a shouldn't be too much of a problem for me.

As I climbed, I only placed a single piece of gear. Rodney had placed a piece very deep, and it was difficult to remove (so) I replaced it. I should have been doing the same for all the other pre-placed pieces, removing each and placing them deeper in the crack. They were also a size too small, so the cams were too flared. I didn't have the proper gear or knowledge to fix the placements.

As I let go after asking for a take—with the mindset of a sport climber (my fifth mistake), the piece twisted, locked up, and tore away a chunk of rock as it tried to hold. The two pieces below also twisted and came out, though they didn't take as much rock with them. Final mistake: I wasn't wearing my helmet.

The luck I had that day bore these lessons into me like a laser:

- Wear a helmet! I don't care what you think of yourself or your self-image. You can fall. And you can hit your head. Do it.
- What you climb on sport lead doesn't translate to trad. Trad climbing is a different level of climbing that takes years to feel comfortable and even more to master.
- Know what you're doing. If you're climbing at your limit on trad, you had better know exactly what you're doing or you will pay the consequences. (Source: Gram Parker)

FALL ON ROCK, CLIMBING ALONE, FAILURE TO MAINTAIN CONTROL OF ROPE, UNFAMILIAR WITH DEVICE, NO BACK-UP, FATIGUE

Nevada, Red Rock Canyon NCA, Tunnel Vision

On February 4, a male climber had been rope soloing the 5.9 bolted first pitch variation to Tunnel Vision when he decided to retreat at the fourth bolt due to the pitch being harder than anticipated. When rappelling, he experienced difficulty with the device repeatedly "locking" and was trying to find a position on the lowering handle that would cause the rope to lower with less drag. (He was using a fairly new 60mx10.2 rope.)

He had placed the handle in the full open locked position and was trying to find a position in the handle range that he had used before to get a smooth descent. At some point, he took his hand off the brake side of the rope and began to use both hands to try and adjust the handle. There was no backup in place.

The device unlocked abruptly in mid range (between the locked open and closed handle positions) and the climber went into free fall of about 25 feet. He managed to grab the brake side of the rope, causing rope burns to his hand. The device then locked but during dynamic stretch of the rope, he impacted the ground feet first. He injured both