

Tech Tip - Sport - Epic insurance

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how to safely retreat from a sport route

You're psyched to try The Gift (5.12d) at Red Rocks, but it's several letter grades beyond your previous hardest redpoint. You're unsure about pulling the crux moves, and you might have to bail before the anchors. The question, then, is how to retreat without leaving a pirate's bounty of climbing hardware. Follow these simple tips and you'll be back on terra firma, treasure trove safely in hand.

Bailing basics. The simplest trick is to carry two heavy-duty, 3/8-inch, steel oval screw-links (or two bail biners, which have the added advantage of being easier for subsequent parties to remove), which retail for about \$2 at any hardware store. After you've flailed so much that dental surgery seems more appealing than another whipper, fasten a screw-link to your highest bolt and lower. The key here, as always, is redundancy. Don't be cheap: Clip your rope into a second bail biner or screw-link one bolt down.

Kings of rap. This is a good way to bail, provided that you're no more than a third of your rope's length off the deck. (Note: This technique requires going off belay.) First, clip into your highest bolt (and ideally the next bolt down, using a longer sling) with a sling girth-hitched through your waist belt and leg loops, then pass a tied or sewn shoulder sling through the hanger so that an equal portion hangs from both sides. Clip a knotted bight of the rope to your harness, untie from the rope, then thread the tail through both loops of the sling until the tail reaches the ground. Pull up the belayer's side of the rope and, using a bowline or figure-8-with-follow-through, tie that tail to the side of the sling with the knot or stitching

hanging out of the bolt hanger, ensuring that the rope isn't weighting the sling on either the knot or the stitching (figure 1). This prevents the sling from snagging in the bolt hanger and hanging up your rope! You — and your belayer — should ensure that both a tail and a loop of rope are on the deck. Now rappel (clip one strand of the rappel line to the next bolt down as a back-up). Retrieve your rope by pulling from the looped side, so that the tail slides freely through the sling. Now pull the strand tied to the sling to retrieve your rope and the sling from the hanger above. Retire the sling.

Lord of the rings. If the bolt at your high point has a smooth, ring-type hanger, as with a Fixe glue-in (don't do this with a regular hanger!), you can lower and leave the barest minimum of gear. (Note: It's essential that you stay on belay throughout this process.) Clip into the hanger with a locking biner on a sling girth-hitched through your harness. With another locker, clip a figure-eight-on-a-bight to your belay loop (figure 2). This keeps you from dropping the rope and backs you up through the bolts below. Untie from the rope, thread the tail through the bolt, and tie back in. Clean your quickdraws as you descend, leaving either a biner or screw-link one bolt down for insurance.

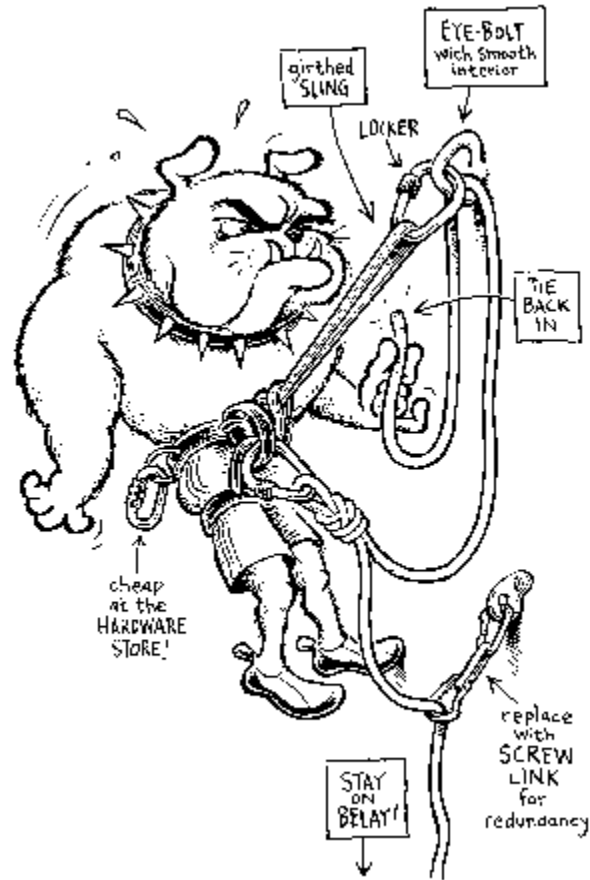


Figure 2. Do not use this technique with anything other than a ring bolt.

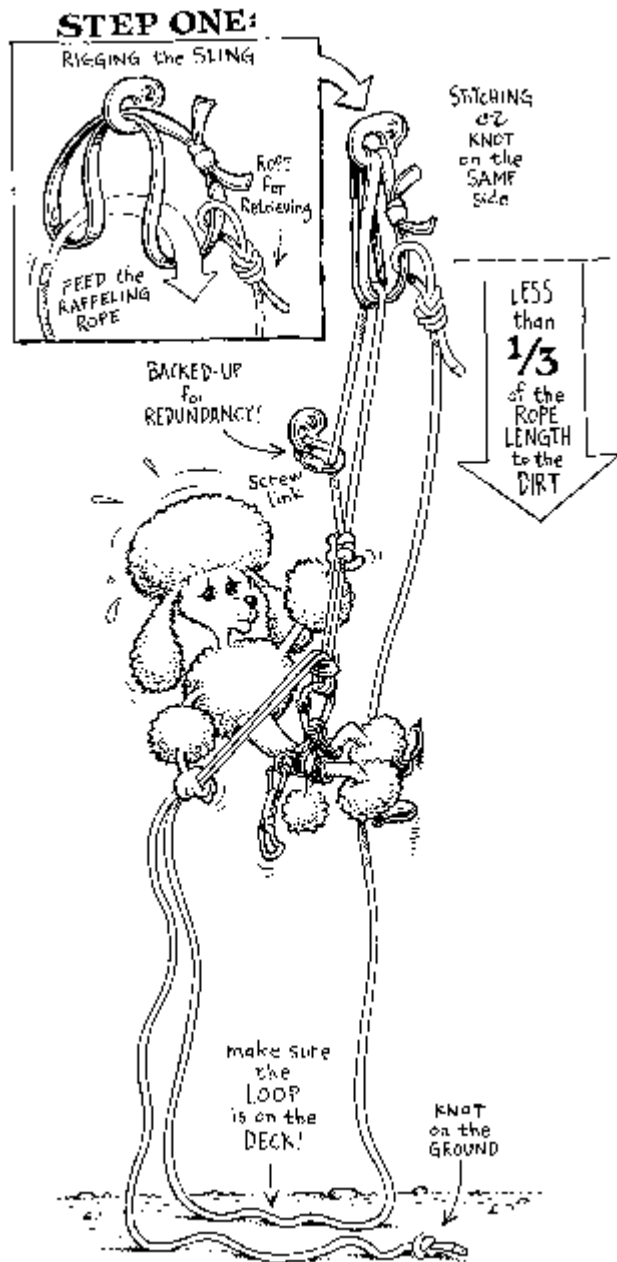


Figure 1. Should'a trained harder — sometimes retreat is your best option.