

spring to early summer. Although Farnan correctly judged conditions on the route itself, there was no way of knowing that the cornice had been sufficiently weakened to unload. Climbing beneath this sort of feature is a calculated risk of mountaineering, and the cornice failed despite passing all the usual tests such as sufficient cold weather, no visible cracks or weaknesses, and no previous unloading. (Source: Jim Detterline, Longs Peak Supervisory Climbing Ranger, Rocky Mountain National Park)

*(Editor's Note: In 1992, according to Rocky Mountain National Park Chief Ranger Joseph Evans, there were 314 SAR callouts, 34 of which involved technical climbers. But 25 of these were "overdue" parties, and only four of them were significant in terms of manpower and expenditures of money. In three of these cases, three climbers were fatalities. Seven callouts involved technical climbers in trouble—some of whom were experienced, some of whom were beginners. The point to be made is that climbers—as opposed to hikers and scramblers—accounted for only a small percentage of the SAR activity overall. However, as we often mention, media and various agencies tend to count all SAR missions in Rocky Mountain National Park, and other parks with a mountain orientation, as "mountaineering" or "mountain related" accidents, lending false credence to the notion that the sport has a high accident rate and is very dangerous.)*

## **INADEQUATE ANCHOR, FALL ON ROCK, FALLING ROCK, FATIGUE, EXCEEDING ABILITIES**

### **Idaho, City of Rocks**

On March 25, 1992, Dan Maynes (24) and I (23) were climbing at City of Rocks National Reserve in Southern Idaho. We had both just graduated in Mechanical Engineering. Dan, who had been climbing for two years, had gotten me interested in climbing two months earlier. Due to a mild winter, we had been able to spend 15 to 20 hours per week climbing for the past four weeks in Logan Canyon, just minutes from campus.

This was our second day at City of Rocks. We did not have a guide book for the area, but had been able to find a number of routes we were both able to climb. I did not know the difficulty of the routes I led, but knew that they were more difficult than any I had attempted before. (They had been 5.10d and 5.11a.) I felt great and knew this was the best climbing I had ever done.

Approximately 1730 we headed back to camp to avoid hiking in the dark. We were, however, looking for one last easy climb to finish on. The bolts on a route called "City Girls" located on Flaming Rock caught our eyes. I led the route. About half way up I stopped and exclaimed to Dan that this was a little tougher than I had expected. (It was a 5.10d.) Wanting to finish the day on a high note, I pressed on and finished the route without incident. However, as I reached the chains at the top, I ran into a problem. I did not have a good hold and my tiring forearms told me that I would most likely peel if I freed a hand to attach my last quick draw. I made an impulsive decision to continue on two more feet to reach a wide, 15 foot deep horizontal ledge. There I was able to rest in safety. However, now I could not safely reach down to the chains to rappel back down.

I found 15 feet behind me two nylon climbing slings tied where two rock surfaces were "pinched" together. The rock "pinch" was formed by at least one large table size boulder wedged against the surface of the main crag. I inspected the slings and found both to be tied securely. One was faded and ragged, but the other appeared nearly new.

Using a five foot loop of nylon webbing I had with me and two carabiners, I anchored

the back of my harness to the slings. I pulled at the anchor while watching the “pinch” for any movement. It seemed very solid. I then sat down on the edge and belayed Dan up to the top of the climb. Dan untied from the rope as I unhooked myself from the slings. We could stand ten feet from the edge of the ledge so we felt secure even though we were not roped in. I threaded the rope through the sling and gave it a tug that I felt would represent the force it would see during rappelling. Nothing budged. Dan inspected the slings and even tried to move the table size boulder. He gave the anchor his nod of approval. Before he could thread the rope through his rappel device, I stopped him. Sitting on the rock to belay him up the route, I had gotten cold and asked if I could go first. He obliged and I threaded the rope through my figure 8 and approached the edge.

I had never rappelled with a single rappel anchor of this nature before. I had, however, descended using live trees as single anchors. In my mind this set up was equally as stout. This may have been influenced by the fact that I was so cold. I eased myself over the edge to begin the descent. This is all I remember.

According to Dan, just as I disappeared over the lip and out of his sight, he heard a sharp crack behind him and a frightful yelp from below. He saw the climbing rope and large pieces of rock falling over the lip in my direction. Some of the rock hit Dan as it rolled toward the edge. The table size boulder had pivoted and its end that created the pinch had broken off allowing the sling to pull through. I fell helplessly 60 feet to the ground.

Dan yelled frantically to me but there was only deadly silence. He quickly gathered his gear and began searching for a place to down climb. He reached me approximately 15 minutes later. I was lying in a creek at the base of the climb semiconscious and disoriented. The top of the climb was inverted, allowing me to fall feet first touching nothing until I met the ground. The rock that had fallen appeared to have had enough momentum to land away from the base of the route and had not hit me. Dan checked my vitals then left to get help. He quickly found three other climbers nearby. He sent one to the ranger station while the others accompanied him back with sleeping bags to cover me in the near freezing water. The City of Rocks Quick Response Unit, a Burly, Idaho, ambulance and a Life Flight helicopter were summoned. About 2130 I arrived by Life Flight at Bannock Medical Center in Pocatello, Idaho. I do remember the helicopter ride. I remember being in a tremendous amount of pain and not knowing why or what was going on. I was assessed with multiple lacerations, internal injuries and a pelvis broken in two places, allowing my right leg and hip joint to be impacted 3 1/2 inches into my body cavity.

The next afternoon I was flown to the University of Utah Medical Center in Salt Lake City. I remained there for 16 days, returning six weeks later to have two large fixator pins that extended from my hips removed. I was on crutches for five months returning once in June for surgery to correct fractures in my right foot not previously detected. By mid September I was walking slowly without the aid of crutches.

### **Analysis**

I believe that the “pinch” had been a popular rappel anchor and had been used by many climbers, probably even the person who bolted the route nearly 12 years earlier. The fact that there was still a considerable amount of snow in the area means that I could have been the first to use the “pinch” this season. This leads me to believe that the shifting could have been caused by cracks formed during the freeze/thaw cycle.

There are two things that should be gained in reading this account. First, a word of

caution: be mindful of the power of erosion and the freeze/thaw cycle in early spring. Second, use a double rappel anchor. ALWAYS! (Source: Darin Ewer)

### **INADEQUATE BELAY, FALL ON ROCK, LIGHTNING, FEAR**

#### **Idaho, City of Rocks, Elephant Rock**

On June 20, 1992, Lew Peterson (34) and Mark Parent (35) were climbing "Just Say No" (5.9) when the following accident happened. Peterson was belaying Parent, who had finished leading the climb. Peterson was lowering him using a figure 8 belay device. The 165 foot rope which Peterson was feeding out through his belay device was stored in a rope bag located just behind Peterson. Because the rope was being fed out from the bag, Peterson could not see how much rope was remaining. As Parent was leaning back, being lowered, the last of the rope fed out from the rope bag and ran through Peterson's belay device before he could react. Parent had reached the third bolt (approximately 35 feet above the ground) when the rope became free of Peterson's belay device and Parent fell the remaining distance to the ground. He reportedly landed on his feet and rolled partially down the slope below the climb. Peterson dashed to keep him from rolling and protected his head from hitting the rock. He fractured his pelvis, but has fully recovered.

#### **Analysis**

"Just Say No" is approximately 120 feet long and requires two ropes, tied together, to lower or rappel off. The other descent option is to walk off of an easy slope on the back side of Elephant Rock.

Mike Parent was reportedly a very experienced climber while Peterson had only two years of experience. Peterson said that Parent was so comfortable with his rope management skills that he often went too fast for Peterson to be fully prepared or understand the actions before they happened. Peterson also said that he had had several other close calls while climbing with Parent and described Parent as being almost too casual in his climbing. Peterson said that he was initially under the impression that they would walk off after climbing and that when they began the lowering, it did not seem right to him.

Parent added in his own report that both the belayer and climber should be tied in regardless of the length of the rope, and that the belayer needs to be aware of when the mid-point of the rope has passed him. He said further that the plan had been for Parent to belay Peterson from the top anchor and then both would walk off. But as Parent is really afraid of lightning, he decided to be lowered off than to be highly exposed, even for just five minutes. (Sources: Maura Longden, Ranger, City of Rocks National Reserve, and Mark Parent)

### **INADEQUATE BELAY, INATTENTION, FALL ON ROCK**

#### **Idaho, City of Rocks, Rabbit Rock**

On Friday, August 7, 1992, at 1300, Andrew (33) and Glenda Lainias (34) were climbing a route called "Sudden Pleasure." Andrew Lainias had reached the top of the climb and was being lowered on the rope by Glenda Lainias. Glenda was controlling his descent by using a Stitchplate belay/friction device. According to one witness, Sherry Grigsby, Glenda Lainias and Grigsby had discussed the fact that using a single rope length to lower Andrew would not adequately allow him to reach the ground. They both believed that one rope length would reach the top of a pillar at the base of the route and that Andrew would be able to safely down climb from there to the ground. While Glenda was lowering An-