

Hall ran up to Chasm Lake in approximately 45 minutes carrying a 65 pound raft on his back. Dick was floated across Chasm Lake by the “Long’s Peak Navy” to a waiting Aerostar. (Source: Jim Detterline, Longs Peak Supervisory Climbing Ranger)

## **FALL ON SNOW, UNROPED, POOR POSITION**

### **Colorado, Mount Sneffles**

*(Following is a letter from Adam Beal [early 20’s] to a friend.)*

Our plan was to set up a base camp on Sunday, and then do a technical ascent of Mount Sneffles on June 24. The climb up Mount Sneffles (14,000 feet) had us crossing talus, snow, ice and rock. The climb was easy but committing, seven pitches and about 1,000 feet of 5.1 to 5.5 climbing. At the end of the climb we reached a couloir that we planned to climb the final 100 to 200 feet to the summit on. After realizing that it was time to descend whether or not we could summit, I decided to check the couloir as a possible descent route. I walked about 30 feet out onto the snow, and decided against glissading down because of the softness and 45 or 50 degree grade. Then I slipped. I didn’t have crampons on my feet for traction, nor did I have a rope on (after being roped for about eight hours that day). I tried a few times to self-arrest with my ice ax, but the snow was just too soft. I was at the mercy of the mountain, and probably moved 30 to 50 mph down the snow as I rammed into boulders and the walls of the couloir on my way down. When I finally stopped around 1,500 feet lower than I had started, I was amazingly lucky to be alive. I landed at the base of the snow on a rocky talus slope.

So there I was, alone and badly injured at 13,000 feet. I had a right wrist that had been broken in three or four places, and my formerly white climbing helmet was now red from the trauma to my face. I had a deep cut under my left eyebrow, the inside of my lower lip was badly cut and my upper lip was ripped clean through with a gash over an inch long. I was disoriented but still quite conscious. I immediately grabbed my first aid kit from my pack, which luckily was still attached to my back, and splinted my wrist with a splint and an ace bandage. Then I knew that it was time to descend back to base camp, 2,000 feet and one to two miles away. I left my pack and helmet, unable to carry them, and started off. I yelled for my partner Geoff or to anyone else who could hear me, but I heard no reply. It was now almost dark, and not having the strength to descend on foot, I started sliding down on my butt. The slope here was very mild, so I was at least safe from another fall. After two hours of sliding and yelling, I finally heard Geoff yelling back to me and could faintly see his headlamp in the darkness. Since I had forgotten my headlamp in my pack, I had to yell to him until he reached me.

Geoff had slowly cut footsteps for himself as he descended on foot the very way that I had slid. After assessing my injuries, he tried to help me to my feet to get to base camp. I was still unable to walk, so we started sliding down together, my legs and arms wrapped around Geoff. After a few minutes, I realized that I could go no further, so Geoff left me for our base camp to get sleeping bags. As he left, he warned me not to fall asleep. With the incredible amount of pain in my wrist, that seemed easy.

Geoff returned about one to one and a half hours later with our bags and the good news that he’d run into some other people camped near us. They left immediately to go get help even though it was probably near 2300 and it was three or four miles to the trailhead and another 30 to 60 minutes to a phone. My friend stayed by my side as I warmed in both of our bags for a while. After a short time I was able to give him back his

bag, but he stayed awake all night to watch over me. Since I had forgotten to grab any pain pills from my first aid kit, I was in an amazing amount of pain and was only able to sleep for a few minutes at a time.

Almost at the crack of dawn, three people on the mountain rescue team arrived where we were around 12,500 feet. By this time, my eyes were so swollen shut that I couldn't see any of my rescuers. After stabilizing my neck and placing me into a Stokes litter, they called for a helicopter to airlift me out. Thirty minutes in the helicopter got me to a hospital in Montrose. Luckily, I was given a good dose of morphine for pain, and slept for the entire airlift. I woke up in the emergency room where they proceeded to cut all of my expensive outdoor clothes off my body with trauma shears. My face was sewn up in three places by a plastic surgeon and then I was taken to surgery for the wrist. I woke up with four pins in my wrist.

I spent two and a half days in the hospital. While I was there, I realized that I had lost half of one of my front upper teeth (to be repaired over the next few weeks with a root canal, cap and crown) and that my entire face had been abraded by the snow so badly that it was almost completely scabbed over. I couldn't eat solid food for almost a week afterwards.

My parents flew me back to Michigan on Thursday afternoon. I met my mom and brother at Detroit Metro, and they didn't recognize me at first. When they both realized who I was, they started... crying. It sucked. And here I've been ever since.

## **FALL ON ROCK—ROCK Foothold CAME OFF, FAILURE TO TEST HOLD, PROTECTION PULLED OUT**

### **Colorado, Rocky Mountain National Park, Spearhead**

On July 23, at 1030, Michael Munsch (34) was leading the fourth pitch (5.6) on the Sykes Sickle route (III 5.9+) on Spearhead. He climbed 20 feet above the belay ledge, placed a "marginal" piece of protection, and continued another five to ten feet. At this point, Munsch stepped on a loose rock which gave way. Munsch fell, the marginal piece of protection failed, and he impacted on the ledge with belayer David T. Many. Munsch sustained fractures of both ankles and soft tissue injury to his right elbow. Many lowered Munsch three pitches to the ground, and then went for assistance to park ranger Dave McKee at Black Lake. Munsch's injuries were stabilized and he was evacuated by Flight for Life helicopter from the base of the climb.

### **Analysis**

Spearhead and its most traveled routes such as Sykes Sickle have a well-deserved reputation for sound and solid quartz monzonite rock. However, even the best alpine rock is subject to freeze-thaw effects, where water creeps behind cracks, pushes a rock when it turns to ice at night and expands, and thus loosens rocks to become climbers' traps. The pitch Munsch fell on was moderate; much below his leading standards, and was typical of alpine rock in that the lower-angled pitches are those most subject to freeze-thaw effects. Treat alpine rock like desert rock, testing or gradually weighting holds. Place the best protection possible at regular intervals despite the easiness of the climbing.

Munsch did an excellent job of landing correctly (on his feet) after his fall, and he was wearing a helmet, but the distance and hard surface factors were too significant to avoid injury. Many is to be commended for his excellent and efficient handling of a severely-injured partner on a three pitch evacuation, and for his prompt summoning of the emergency medical system. (Source: Jim Detterline, Longs Peak Supervisory Climbing Ranger)