

FALL ON ROCK, PROTECTION PULLED OUT, NO HARD HAT

Colorado, Rocky Mountain National Park, The Book

On February 6 at 1600, Kevin Hare (19) was leading the 5.9 traverse pitch near the top of J Crack (III, 5.9) on The Book formation. One of Hare's feet slipped on the face climbing section of the traverse pitch. He suffered a lead fall, swinging left, back beneath the last piece of protection he had placed in the hand crack at the start of the traverse. The piece pulled out, and Hare fell 30–40 feet onto a ledge, landing on his stomach. He sustained a fractured finger, laceration to the back of his head, and bruising to his lower back. Hare's belayer, Katelyn Shumaker, was able to lower him to the base of the route to await park rescue personnel.

Analysis

The traverse out of the J Crack is difficult and complicated by some tough route finding. One really needs to be more than just a 5.9 leader to negotiate this pitch. Because the face traverse section is completely unprotected, the final placement in the hand crack needs to be bombproof. The prudent leader may use an extra piece as part of that anchor to insure the integrity of the anchor. Because Mr. Hare was not wearing a hard hat, he sustained a head injury. (Source: Jim Detterline, Longs Peak Ranger)

RAPPEL ERROR – SLACK IN ROPE, FALL ON ROCK

Colorado, Rocky Mountain National Park, Twin Owls

On June 25 Todd Burke had led the first pitch of Organ Pipes (II, 5.6) on the Twin Owls formation. He then pulled the rope up through all pieces of protection and threw one end of the rope down to Claudine Perrault (29). The plan was for Perrault to attach their packs to the rope so that Burke could pull them up rather than return to the base to get them or carry them up the route. However, when Burke tossed the rope, it snagged, leaving the lower end 20–30 feet above the ground. Perrault climbed unroped to the rope end and pulled on it, causing a length of slack to come free and the rope end to fall to the ground. Perrault then attempted to rappel, assuming that the slack was out of the rope. But it was not. She fell 30 feet, sustaining a concussion and minor spinal injuries.

Analysis

The accident itself is the immediate result of failure by both Burke and Perrault to test the rappel adequately by pulling slack out from both ends. However, the underlying and ultimate cause of the accident is the faulty tactical planning by the leader. Acceptable alternatives to the tactics include 1) climb while wearing packs; 2) take just bare necessities; 3) take an extra rope, light weight 7–9 mm, as a haul line; and/or 4) take the extra time to return to the base of the route to pick up non-essential equipment left in packs. (Source: Jim Detterline, Longs Peak Ranger)

FALL ON ROCK, INADEQUATE BELAY

Colorado, Rocky Mountain National Park, The Book

On June 28 at 1015, Dale Yang (31) fell while leading the first pitch of the J

Crack (III, 5.9) on The Book formation. Yang's belayer, Lance Polonbo, released the belay to brace himself for the fall. Polonbo then unsuccessfully attempted to re-grab the rope, but Yang's fall was instead stopped by a ledge. The 30-foot fall resulted in lower back injuries and a rescue for Yang.

Analysis

Many belay devices will automatically lock if the belayer is knocked unconscious or inattentive for other reasons. The Gri-Gri is an example of one such auto locking belay device. Two key factors to remember here: The belayer must not let go with the brake hand and should be tied in to an anchor system—even if on the ground. Belaying is a skill that should be practiced and perfected in a controlled environment. (Source: Jim Detterline, Longs Peak Ranger)

FALL ON ROCK, FAILED TO FOLLOW ROUTE, INADEQUATE PROTECTION, NO HARD HAT

Colorado, Rocky Mountain National Park, Hallett Peak

On July 28, Frederick Sperry (28) was attempting to lead the second pitch of the Culp Bossier Route (III, 5.8) on Hallett Peak. Sperry should have followed the crack starting off the left side of the ledge, but instead he started off route from the center of the ledge and through a small roof to an unprotected face. Sperry realized his error, but instead of down-climbing, he attempted to traverse right toward the crack on the Jackson Johnson Route. After traversing approximately 30 feet with no protection, Sperry slipped and fell 70–80 feet, including a substantial pendulum. Sperry said that as he fell he scraped his back, hurt both ankles, broke a finger, and struck his head on a ledge, causing a three-inch laceration.

Analysis

Routes on the North Face of Hallett Peak are notorious for route finding difficulties. To increase chances of success with route finding, study the guide-book carefully and frequently, and look up, right, left and all around to consider and plan all options. Don't force the route to fit the description, however. If the path chosen doesn't feel right, back off before retreat becomes impossible. Then reevaluate route options, including total retreat. As for a hard hat, Mr. Sperry, like Mr. Hare on The Book (above), sustained a head injury because he was not wearing one. (Source: Jim Detterline, Longs Peak Ranger)

FALLING ROCK – DISLODGED BY CLIMBER, FAILURE TO TEST HOLDS

Colorado, Rocky Mountain National Park, Little Twin Owls

On August 7 at 1900, Bryan Pollack (36) was ascending the Descent Route (I, 5.2) on Little Twin Owls formation to place a top rope set up on the Finger Crack. Approximately ten feet above a ledge, Pollack pulled out a block of rock weighing about 40 pounds. Pollack stepped down to the ledge, but the rock struck him in the left leg, crushing it against another rock. Pollack sustained a fractured left femur and injuries to his knee and lower leg. He was able to move himself to a position of comfort atop a rock fin while his partner went to get park rescue assistance.