

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.

Analysis

The descent route on Little Twin Owls is both ascended and descended by countless numbers of climbers every year and is as clean and solid as any route gets. This accident emphasizes the need to test holds as a matter of routine procedure before weighting them, even though it doesn't guarantee that you won't dislodge a loose rock. Mr. Pollack is to be commended for executing the evasive maneuver back to the ledge that probably saved his life, although it is unfortunate that he still sustained serious injuries.

Questions may be raised regarding the appropriateness of climbing unroped on this easy route. The answers are not so definitive. A rope may have allowed Mr. Pollack to jump safely away, but possibly it would also have kept him in the direct line of the falling rock, allowed for leader fall injuries, allowed for the rope to be struck and broken, and/or potentially have placed a belayer in grave danger. (Source: Jim Detterline, Longs Peak Ranger)

EXHAUSTION – UNABLE TO DESCEND, DEHYDRATION, EXCEEDING ABILITIES

Colorado, Rocky Mountain National Park, Longs Peak

On September 1, a Colorado Mountain School guide reported to park rangers that Tim Ashwood (40), a climber with cerebral palsy who had been on the Diamond of Longs Peak for eight days, was ill and would need assistance in descending on the following morning. Ashwood was assisted by partners Jim Thurman and Matt Bliss in jumarring up the Diamond. Park rangers responded on September 2 with a horse to evacuate Ashwood to Longs Peak Trailhead, where he was transported by ambulance to Estes Park Medical Center. Ashwood was suffering from low energy levels, nausea, and dehydration. He was treated with four liters of IV fluid.

Analysis

While Ashwood is to be commended for his perseverance in attempting the realization of his dream—a climb of the Diamond—the nature of his condition and the inability of Ashwood and his partners to manage his energy levels and hydration were the primary causes of this incident. Contributory causes discovered by investigating park rangers included an obsessive desire of Ashwood in wanting to complete this climb at any cost. He had already failed several times. Also, there was commercial interest on the part of Ashwood's partners, amateur guides intending to profit from the publicity they got for hosting the climb. (Source: Jim Detterline, Longs Peak Ranger)

FALL ON ICE, INADEQUATE PROTECTION, POOR TOOL PLACEMENT, EXCEEDING ABILITIES

Colorado, Rocky Mountain National Park, Hidden Falls

On December 20, Ben Johnson (21) was leading Hidden Falls Left (I, WI, 3+) belayed by Krys Obrzut. Johnson climbed the first steep step to the ledge and placed the only screw he used on the route. Johnson continued up the vertical face and was climbing confidently and aggressively. He was attempting to make