

all about. It is most important to stack the odds in your favor by pitting your skills instead of mere luck against the mountain. (Source: Jim Detterline—Longs Peak Area Ranger, and Mark Magnuson—Wild Basin District Ranger, Rocky Mountain National Park)

*(Editor's Note: A correction from last year's Colorado section on the spelling of Bastille Crack. It managed to get in one report as "Bestowal" Crack—due to an auto spell checker, then being missed by proof reader.*

*There were two fatalities that don't appear in the Colorado narratives. One was a rappelling accident in Boulder Canyon and the other was a free fall on the Flatirons, both in February, and because both were solo, there are no details.)*

## **FALL ON ROCK, INADEQUATE PROTECTION, POOR TECHNIQUE**

### **New Hampshire, Cathedral Ledge, Recompense**

On June 28, Bayard Russel (26) and I (Rand McNally—48) were climbing Recompense (5.9). I was leading the first pitch and we were using a double-rope technique, which I had only done once before. The first pitch is moderate (5.7) and well within my ability. I had led it before on a single rope.

It was a very hot day, and this was my first climb in my shoes since they had been resoled. I had a piece (or protection) at my feet with a shoulder-length sling attached. I could have placed a piece above my head, but the route was traversing left, so drag would be a factor—and it's a long climb requiring large pieces toward the end. There was a small ledge in the fall-zone, but I felt that if I fell, I would clear it. I made a thin, slabby face-move to the left and slipped in such a way that I sled straight down, contacting the ledge with the outside edge of my left foot. I suffered a compound ankle fracture.

We initiated self-rescue, and as we were rappelling through the woods and talus, we were met by a local guide and members of the Mountain Rescue Service, who were climbing nearby.

### **Analysis**

The long sling was superfluous and left me with more distance to fall. (I needed) better protection and better use of rope technique, and better assessment of the conditions. The heat made me sweaty and new soles made my shoes less sensitive, so what was normally a moderately difficult move, this day I was unable to complete. (Source: Rand McNally)

Recompense is one of those climbs whose level of difficulty can be deceiving, especially for less experienced leaders. The pitch is very long—a full 60 meters, and requires lots of gear. It also traverses gradually from right to left with the crux of the climb being in the last 30 feet. There are also a lot of fixed pitons, but all of them are old and should be backed up. Many climbers fail to protect adequately here. (Source: Al Hospers)

## **FALL ON ROCK, ROPE SEVERED**

### **New Hampshire, Eagle Cliff, Shape Shifters**

Steve Dupuis and Jon Sykes, both experienced climbers, were attempting to free a climb they had put up as an A4 aid climb some time before. On October

14, they met at the parking lot to sort gear. They had a 60 meter, 10.2 mm and 60 meter, 9 mm ropes. It was cold and there was a little ice on the cliff as they walked in.

Jon led the first pitch and did a slight variation to the original. It was a slow lead and the rock was a little slick. He belayed at a two-bolt anchor about 100 feet up. He fixed the climbing rope and Steve juggled 30–40 feet to a stance at a ledge where he noticed that the sheath of the rope he was juggling on was frayed about ten feet above him. He reset the nut that Jon had placed, clipped in with a sling and Jon threw down an end of the 9 mm. After tying in, Steve free-climbed the remainder of the pitch. When he got to where the 10.2 rope was frayed, he tied in above it with a figure 8 knot and continued climbing, belayed on the 9 mm. At the belay he tied off and hauled up the 10.2. They observed that sheath was cut on the rope and there was about one inch of exposed core. At that time they looked the entire rope over, except where Jon was tied in, and it looked like there were no other problems. They cut the 10.2 above the fray and threw it down.

Steve tied back into the end of the 10.2 mm. At that time he was still tied into the 9 mm, but was not belayed on it; HOWEVER, the 9 mm was tied off to the anchor! They talked about where the bolt should go. On the original A4 version of the second pitch, Jon had taken a line that angled steeply off to the right. Steve free climbed three or four moves off the belay. He found what looked like a good bolt placement but there was no gear between it and the belay. He was 8–10 feet to the right and about a foot above the belay at a stance on a four to six inch ledge that was leaning out. He got into his aiders using a BD hook on an in-cut ledge about four feet above his feet. He tried to drill a bolt with a small electric hand drill, but couldn't apply enough pressure using only one hand, so he sent the drill back to Jon on the 9 mm. Steve wanted to get a pin in a crack, but he was unable to reach it from his stance. They were talking to each other all the time and Steve was saying that he was going to move back to his left. As he was switching his feet in his aiders, the hook popped. Steve expected only a short fall and he anticipated hitting the ledge. As he pendulummed to his left, he felt a jerk and "saw the rope go white." He knew he was falling.

He hit a ledge about 30 feet below the belay with his left side, somersaulted and tumbled, continuing another 70–90 feet to the ground, landing on his back. His Ecrin Roc helmet came off on impact and landed 40 feet away. Steve remained conscious both throughout the fall and after. He and Jon called back and forth to confirm that he was still alive. Steve was still tied into the 9 mm rope and had to untie it before Jon could rappel down to help. The rope was under a lot of tension and when Steve let it go, it jerked away. As he had tied into the 9 mm at least 30 feet up during the initial climbing on the first pitch, the stretch in the rope helped lessen his impact on the ground. In addition, he was wearing three layers of clothing, top and bottom, and had an almost-full Camelback HOG on his back containing additional gear.

## Analysis

Dupuis has been rock climbing for over 17 years. This was the first time he has fallen this far and this hard. “It’s all part of the hazards (of rock climbing),” Dupuis said. “The system was supposed to take the weight of the fall and I guess it’s an unlucky catastrophic failure. The rope was under two years old and in mint condition. It was babied.” Amazingly enough Steve only had relatively minor injuries and has completely recovered. He has returned to climbing and guiding.

So these were two strong climbers with many years of experience between them, but despite the fact that they had already had one rope badly cut, neither climber noticed that the belay ledge on the second pitch had extremely sharp edges. When Steve fell, his rope remained taut as he pendulumed, and that rope, under tension, scraped along the edge of the belay ledge and was cut as if by a serrated knife.

Forgetting to untie from the 9mm rope may have saved Steve’s life, though his helmet and clothing played a role too. However, we can’t say for sure that using double ropes would have prevented the accident. It’s possible that two ropes under tension from the fall could have cut as easily the one, with disastrous results.

If climbers know of or discover en route sharp edges that could slice a rope, they should pad the edge, or place protection that will direct the rope away from the edge. Trying to free an aid climb requires a bit of thought about protection and the line of the original route—especially if there are sharp edges to consider.

Finally, if you are freeing an aid route, tying into your haul line, and clipping the other end and middle of the rope to the belay (an old aid climber’s trick) as a worst-case backup, never hurts. (Sources: Al Hospers, Jed Eliades, and Alexander MacInnes, in *The Caledonian Record*, October 16, 2002)

## AVALANCHE, POOR POSITION, INADEQUATE EQUIPMENT

### New Hampshire, Mount Washington, Tuckerman Ravine

Tom Striker and Tony Tulip, hiked up in to Tuckerman Ravine on November 29. The first in the ravine, they hiked to the base of an open book on the right of center and decided to climb it straight up. Tom belayed at an exposed bulge and put in three screws equalized with a cordelette. He observed what looked like a lot of snow-loading on the slope in front of him, before the next steep section. At that time three other climbers (Tom Burke, Rick Doucette, and Matt Coutre) showed up at base of their climb, geared up and started soloing. One climber was on the right and two on the left side of the book. Tony, the second, climbed up to the belay and around the same time the three soloists joined up on a slope above them. At this time Striker and Tony didn’t like what was happening and decided to bail. Tony continued up a little and traversed right to a position near the Tuckerman Ravine Trail.