

## Analysis

It would appear they didn't know the rock well enough to understand that the best option here might be to rappel rather than lower. Another question is why they didn't have two ropes. It seems that the new generation of climbers takes only one rope on multi-pitch climbs. Taking two ropes, even if the second one is only of small diameter, provides the opportunity to rappel. Whether lowering or rappelling, tying a knot in the end(s) of the rope is usually a good idea. (Source: Jed Williamson)

## FALL ON ROCK

### Colorado, Black Canyon of the Gunnison, Scenic Journey

On May 17, Craig Smith (21) was leading the eighth pitch of the 13-pitch climb Scenic Journey (5.10+), when he wedged his hand into a crack in the rock face to gain a hold. The move was awkward and he couldn't make it stick. He fell both the ten feet to his protective anchor and the ten feet below it. His rope caught him, but his right foot slammed into the wall with a bone-splintering crunch. Over the next seven hours, the men managed to rappel 1,000 feet.

They reached the canyon floor by 9:00 p.m. and for the next nine hours, Smith crawled up to the canyon rim, wearing his rain gear so he wouldn't get poison ivy. They were both quite dehydrated by the time they were half way up because with no water purifier, they decided not to drink water from the nearby Gunnison River. They were fortunate to find a cave with water dripping over the lip. They were able to drink and fill water bottles.

They got to the rim and campground just about sunrise. Smith noticed park Service sign that said, "Caution, very dangerous. Technical climbers only." (Source: Edited from a story by John Aguilar, *Rocky Mountain News*)

## Analysis

It should be noted that they didn't get started until 4:00 p.m. on the 16th because they were trying to find the start of the route. They did four pitches then bivouacked, starting in again the next day.

These climbers are to be commended for successfully rescuing themselves in a remote and difficult place. (Source: Anonymous local climbers)

## RAPPEL ERROR—ANCHOR FAILED

### Colorado, Boulder Canyon, Boulderado

On June 3 at 1635, the Boulder County Sheriff's Office was advised of a fallen climber in Boulder Canyon. Rocky Mountain Rescue Group, Pride-mark Ambulance, Nederland Fire Department, Sugarloaf Fire Department, Boulder County Victim Advocates, the United States Forest Service, and Sheriff's Deputies responded.

At the scene, a man (29) was found on a ledge near the base of a climbing area called the Boulderado. Witnesses said that the climber (29) was setting up a “top-rope” and was seen beginning to rappel from the top of the climb. After he lowered himself about ten feet, the rope anchor failed and he fell about 70–100 feet. During the fall, his rope became tangled in a small tree growing out of the rock face. This stopped his fall about five feet above the ledge. Witnesses cut the rope in order to allow them to lower him to the ground.

From the ledge, the Rocky Mountain Rescue Group conducted a vertical evacuation of about 50 feet to the road. The victim was then transported to a waiting Flight for Life helicopter and was flown to St. Anthony’s Central Hospital with serious injuries.

### **Analysis**

The exact mechanism of the rope anchor failure is unknown, however, a rock, weighing an estimated 250 pounds, was found at the top of the climb that had been very recently dislodged. The rock was resting precariously near the edge of the rock face above the climbing area and vehicle traffic below. After the rescue operation was complete and all people and vehicles moved out of the area, the rock was pushed over the edge to eliminate it as a future safety concern. (Source: Edited from a report from the Boulder County Sheriff’s Office)

*(Editor’s Note: This year there were several incidents involving this kind of anchor problem or lowering problem in Eldorado and Boulder Canyon. A few of the typical ones have been reported here. There was also a fatality at Garden of the Gods, but no pertinent details were available.)*

## **FALL ON ROCK, FALLING ROCK—CLIMBER STANDING ON LARGE ROCK WHEN IT CAME LOOSE, CLIMBING UNROPED**

### **Colorado, Little Bear, Northwest Face**

On July 2 about 10:00 a.m., an experienced climber died from a fall taken from the upper headwall (just below the Blanca-Little Bear ridge) of the Northwest Face route on Little Bear. The party he was in was not roped at the time. He tried to move on a large rock that appeared to be solid. It came off on top of him. The initial fall was about 20 feet, but he continued to tumble down for about 300–400 feet. He died during the fall/tumble from multiple head contusions (though he was wearing a Petzl Ecrin Rock helmet), severe internal injuries, and severely broken extremities (including neck).

The rescue-turned-recovery operation began almost immediately due to radio communications available in the area. His partners reached him about 20 minutes before assistance arrived. A nurse and an experienced SAR member concurred that he was deceased.