

trailhead. She was taken to Estes Park Medical Center, and then transported by ambulance to Boulder Community Hospital. (Source: The National Park Service Morning Report, March 12)

### **STRANDED, DARKNESS, INADEQUATE EQUIPMENT – NO HEADLAMP, INADEQUATE CLOTHING, EXCEEDING ABILITIES**

#### **Colorado, Eldorado Canyon State Park, Yellow Spur**

Around 2:00 p.m. on the afternoon of March 9, I (Nandu Thibeault, 23) and my partner (19) started on Yellow Spur, a seven-pitch, 5.9-rock climb on Redgarden Wall. This was the second multi-pitch traditional climb I've done, so my rope management and racking skills were inefficient. My partner has only been climbing outdoors a few times, so I was leading every pitch. It wasn't until the third pitch that I realized I had forgotten my headlamp.

As I set up the belay on the summit I watched the sun go down, then watched as night slowly crept in as I literally pulled my partner up the crux pitch. I would have set up the belay before the 5.6 arête, but we had only one cordalette so I had to sling my rope around the peak. When my partner finally arrived, I coiled the rope and I had him read the descent information from the Mountain Project printout we had brought with us. We only had about 15 more minutes before it was too dark to read, and I did my best to memorize all of the descent information.

We began to rap in the dark and I had no clue where to go. There were trees and fins of rock, notches, and gullies everywhere; I couldn't remember what the printout said. I checked all the trees for slings or rope burn. I scrambled and checked all the rocks for anchors.

We down-climbed a gully for about 150 yards only to meet a vertical drop. After this recon, I realized that we would be spending the night in our T-shirts. We climbed back up the gully and made a bed out of pine branches on a small low angle pad of rock. The wind forced us to relocate throughout the night, and we tried a number of techniques to stay warm. It was a pretty miserable experience, but as soon as we found the anchors the next morning I was thankful for the lessons learned and ready to attack another multi-pitch climb!

#### **Analysis**

Nadu admitted that Yellow Spur was his second traditional climb and that his partner had limited multi-pitch experience. Given these admissions, it may have been more prudent to choose a less demanding and committing rock climb, especially given the time of day. A small fanny or daypack with headlamp, extra layers, hat, energy bars, and water may have prevented a night out or made the night out more comfortable. (Source: Edited from an email by Nandu Thibeault)

## **FALL OR SLIP ON ROCK, MISCOMMUNICATION**

### **Colorado, Eldorado Canyon State Park, Wind Tower**

On May 4, Lon Abbott (45) and Avery McGill (25) were climbing Recon (5.6) on the Wind Tower. Both men were experienced climbers and wearing helmets. They had been leading, then rappelling all day. During the afternoon Abbott fell from the anchors on top of the first pitch, stopping about 20-30 feet below the belay ledge. Reports suggest that Abbott was tied into the rope while it was under tension from the anchor at the top of the first pitch as it passed through the chains (or the injured climber's gear), down and through a few more pieces, then down to the base of the climb. Abbott had called, "Off belay!" and was not on belay when he fell.

At the on-set of the fall, McGill thought there was rockfall and took shelter underneath an outcrop. When he realized Abbott was falling, he tried to grab the rope but couldn't hold on to it. He suffered a hand injury, suggesting that Abbott fell onto his hand.

Luckily for Abbott, the rope got caught or twisted in the first piece of protection on the pitch, which appeared to "arrest" the fall keeping him from tumbling further down the 4th class slope.

Quick action from climbers in the area saved Abbott's life. He was air lifted to Denver Health Medical Center where his injuries were assessed and included two broken vertebrae, broken ankles, five broken ribs, a broken shoulder blade and a concussion. He is expected to recover.

### **Analysis**

Experienced climbers will often keep the leader on belay when he reaches the top of a pitch, even if he says, "Off belay." This is followed by giving a few feet of slack and then tying a knot in the rope on the brake side of the belay device until it becomes evident that the leader is tied off to the anchor.

Since Abbott and McGill had been leading and rappelling all day, they may not have talked about changing what they had been doing. Instead, McGill may have assumed that they would continue, which leads to the speculation that after leading the pitch Abbott, decided to lower instead of rappelling, but forgot to communicate this with McGill.

There is also some speculation that the "off belay" command did not come from Abbott, but from another party in the immediate area. Whatever happened, it's a good time to remind us all that we should always communicate with our partners. (Source: Edited from entries on mountainproject.com and a rockymountainnews.com websites)

## **FALL OR SLIP ON ROCK, PULLED LOOSE ROCK OFF – FALLING ROCK HIT CLIMBING PARTNER**

### **Colorado, Eldorado Canyon State Park, Doub-Griffith**

During the afternoon on May 27, two experienced climbers, Chris Lee