

weekend was rare, but we face situations where we gauge risk versus reward almost every weekend we spend in the mountains. I am pleading with you to have the courage to turn back. I know the pressure of trying as a trip leader to fulfill group expectations of grandeur, and I know the feeling of being a participant and not wanting to hold back a group. Travel with people you know would accept your discomfort and acknowledge objective hazards and respect them. If someone says they are uncomfortable with a situation, listen. Realize that the people you travel with in the mountains may be the ones who save your life. (Source: Rebecca Stubbs -29 from a post on rockymountainrescue.org) *(Editor's note: The ability to self-arrest a fall on steep snow varies with individual experience and skill, equipment, and snow surface conditions. While perhaps not obvious, it is well established that after falling on steep, icy snow, it is nearly impossible to self-arrest. An additional hazard, that did not come into play in this case is that when attempting self-arrest with crampons on, it is easy to catch the front points, which always exacerbates the fall.)*

FALLING ROCK, FAILURE TO TEST HOLD, SEATED BELAYER

Colorado, Shelf Road

Despite the rain and a recent shoulder dislocation, Joe (32) and Chris (35) decided to keep their plans to climb at Shelf Road to celebrate the end of a hard semester of grad school. Joe was interested in scoping out the area and they were glad that the injury would force Chris and their friend Holly to lead routes without Joe.

Record rains that week pushed Cañon City over the normal annual rainfall mark. After setting up camp on May 14, Chris put up several short routes and found a few loose bits of rock but no major shifts in the rock. Rain on May 15 kept the group, now joined by Holly, to sightseeing and feasting at camp.

May 16 was beautiful and sunny by 10:00 a.m. After packing up camp the group joined a dozen or so groups in the canyon for some easy 5.6-5.8 routes. Chris and Holly were enjoying the challenge of leading all the routes and Joe was able to TR a few. They had found a moderate dihedral with about six or seven bolts on the Piggy Bank wall likely to the right of Piñon Slalom. They were using Rock Climbing Colorado: Falcon Guide that does not give much detail to each area.

After Chris made it past the second bolt, Joe sat down to belay against a perfectly situated tree. About 3:30 p.m., Chris reached the anchor bolt, but she hadn't clipped in or called down, "Safe (sic)." Joe was looking left to talk with their mutual climbing partner. Chris opted to reach high as she prepared to clip into the anchor while she stood on a secure, but small ledge. Without testing the block, she pulled and with little effort it came loose and quickly gained speed. Chris shouted, "Rock!" to alert Joe, but because of his reclining position and little decision time, he could only role off to one side. The 20-pound rock fell unhindered for over 45 feet.

Joe tucked to avoid being struck in the head and rolled left. The crushing force of the stone was surreal as it compressed his body. Striking first his left shoulder blade, the rough limestone dug several lacerations and scrapes. The left quadriceps seemed to take the majority of the force—almost catching the block. He stopped laying face down ten feet from his original belay seat.

Joe was conscious and held onto the belay, expecting Chris to be pulled from her stance by his rolling. In terror, Chris watched an event that she thought would kill her beloved. She was stable on the ledge, but did not secure herself promptly. Joe tried to communicate to Holly to make sure the area was safe, call for help and for someone to take the belay. Joe was using his BD ATC Guide belay/rappel device rather than the Grigri in their pack. After the initial shock, Chris was able to secure herself into the anchor using a PAS.

Moments later other climbers responded to the commotion. The first couple on the scene was a newly certified EMT and his WFR-trained partner. Someone took over the belay while the EMT did a head-to-toe examination of Joe. It was deemed that Joe had not suffered any head or back injuries and was helped to a seated position. Severely shaken, Chris was lowered and cleaned the route.

The amazingly mild injuries sustained during this accident allowed Joe to hike out a quarter mile aided by several other climbers to a vehicle that had been driven into the area. At the hospital it was confirmed that there were no broken bones, head or spinal injuries. Bruised ribs, a contusion of the left quadriceps, a laceration on left shoulder blade and a small puncture wound on the left ankle were the only injuries sustained. The bruised ribs took eight weeks to heal.

Analysis

Test every hold, even in a well-traveled area. Climbing above a standard route will likely be unclean and loose. Do not sit during a belay if at all possible to give greater agility. An auto-locking belay device, if used correctly, can greatly increase the safety if the belayer were to be rendered unconscious. (Source: Edited from a report by J. Black)

FALL ON ROCK – POOR COMMUNICATION

Colorado, Clear Creek Canyon

On Tuesday May 17, American Alpine Club (AAC) Executive Director Phil Powers (50) took four of his employees—Keegan Young, Penn Burris, Sarah Wood, and Deanne Buck—climbing at High Wire Crag in Clear Creek Canyon, a popular and accessible sport climbing area near the AAC headquarters in Golden. The group had varying levels and numbers of years of climbing experience. The goal of the day was team building and preparation for a two-day climbing retreat they had planned for early June.

Upon arrival at the crag, Powers led Cracker Jack (5.8) with Wood belaying him from the ground. He attached two quickdraws to the