

Glacier, topping out at 1600. Possibly a more significant factor here was that they did not research the descent routes and did not have a map and compass. They had concentrated on finding out all they could about the approach (even the shortcuts) and the route with its alternatives. After they topped out, they thought they could descend Thatchtop but got cliffed out and benighted. (Source: Rocky Mountain National Park Rangers)

(Editor's Note: According to David Essex, Chief Park Ranger, the STRANDED and OVERDUE missions in Rocky Mountain National Park were high this year. Three such situations, two of which resulted in fatality, involved scramblers on fairly serious peaks.

Also of note in Colorado were the four avalanche fatalities involving skiers, one of whom was snow boarding. A fifth avalanche accident involved a narrow escape when a solo back country skier, Dakars Gowans (44), was carried a hundred meters down a 37 degree slope into some trees. He was able to crawl back to Lindley Flat, where his friends effected a rescue.

During the past 39 years, according to the Denver Post, 107 people have died in Colorado avalanches. Most of these are probably ski related.)

FALL ON ROCK, NO HARD HAT

Idaho, City of Rocks

On June 25, Tim Herron (early 30s) fell about five meters from Dire Straights. He was held by his rope, but he struck his head. He was lowered to a rock formation below, unconscious and having convulsions. He was evacuated and flown to Pocatello. He died on August 4. (Source: Idaho State Parks and Recreation Accident/Incident Form)

(Editor's Note: This park has become a very popular climbing area. Very few accidents are reported. The ratio of serious injury/fatality to climber days is indicative of the level of expertise which assembles here.)

FALL ON SNOW, CLIMBING ALONE, LOSS OF SKI POLE BASKETS— THEN SKI POLES, STARVATION

Idaho, Mount Borah

In early September, Paul Kovatch (40) began his attempt of Mount Borah. This was his seventh try, and nearly ended his goal of reaching the highest point in each state. Here is a portion of the report he sent:

Dear Sirs of the Accident Booklet:

Were I to give the accident a heading, it would be something like Climbing Alone, Equipment Failure, Loss of Ski Poles, Starvation. The equipment failure was the loss the day before my fall of the round "basket" around the lower part of one of the ski poles. Without that "basket" I couldn't lean on both poles on that 45 degree snowfield. That made the accident almost inevitable. I was coming out of a fairly long, even steeper gully/ chimney, and at first the less steep snow was a relief. Precisely at the base of the snowfield was where the mountain became permanently less steep. For reasons I can't

pinpoint, I didn't stop to figure out the obvious way down—going along the side of the snow, i.e., where it met the rocks. Haste made waste, and away I went. Shock then prevented my being rational enough to effect a successful rescue of the ski poles. Not having the ski poles added at least a week to the ordeal. The first three days after the loss, I had energy. With my ski poles, I'd have been able to walk, slowly and carefully, downhill, into the woods, and out onto a gravel road that I already knew came up to the mouth of the canyon. Few if any hallucinations would have happened, and I probably wouldn't have had to drink urine.

About my rescue, this should be said: I was about to move farther along when those three fellows came marching over the hilltop above me. After going over the route to safety and my car with them, I was going to make it, even had no one been there. I might have been crawling like a worm when I reached the car, but next day I would have reached it.

I couldn't possibly express the look of horror and sympathy on my rescuers' faces when I told them what I'd had to eat and drink.

I will need at least eight tries to reach the summit of Mount Borah. The late Tenzing only needed seven for Everest. Borah is certainly not Everest, but of course, Tenzing was not an amputee. (Source: Paul Kovatch)

LIGHTNING

Maine, Mount Katahdin, Baxter State Park

On August 27, 1990, David Passalacqua (13) was struck and killed by lightning while hiking the Knife Edge near Pamola Peak. He was with a Boy Scout troop consisting of ten Scouts and two leaders. Another Scout and a leader were injured, and all felt the strike, which occurred at 1600 in a brief, but severe, storm. Their location was such that there was no chance for cover for at least another 20 or 30 minutes. (Source: Baxter State Park—Search and Rescue Report)

Analysis

Park officials reported that the Scout troop was experienced, having backpacked many mountains since 1987. The weather report called for a 30 percent chance of showers in the afternoon. The Scouts did not go into the Knife Edge in bad weather. The storm came up suddenly, after they had hiked the Knife Edge Trail and were within 100 meters of Pamola Peak, which is where the strike occurred.

The park Director, Irwin "Buzz" Caverly, indicated that the last recorded lightning strike fatality was in 1968, at Chimney Pond—well below the summits and the timberline. Twenty-two people were marked or affected by that one strike. (Source: Baxter State Park—Search and Rescue Report)

(Editor's Note: While not a climbing accident, this report is included to remind high peaks hikers and climbers in New England of the potential for this hazard. While very few have been killed by lightning in Baxter State Park, the White Mountains, Green Mountains, or Adirondacks, those which have occurred are similar. For instance, in less than 12 months in 1984, an Outward Bound group was struck on Franconia Ridge—causing an instructor fatality—and a man was killed while sitting at a picnic table at the base of Mount Lafayette in Franconia Notch. Both events were during isolated, brief afternoon storms.)