

Analysis

Summer showers in the central Rockies come quickly and violently. However, most daily storms occur around the same time as the previous day's storm, so climbers can easily plan their climb timing around this. This party did not even leave the trailhead until 0930. Also, if caught in a storm, even if familiar with the route like Koppe and Wiegand were, it is better just to rappel off. They still had an additional pitch to ascend above the one on which the accident occurred.

Koppe stated that he was comfortable with leading pitches up to 5.9 in difficulty. On wet rock, the difficulty goes up the scale, especially if the rock has any tripe or similar slimy fungi or lichen species on it. (Source: Jim Detterline, Long's Peak Supervisory Climbing Ranger, based on original reports by Rangers Doug Ridley, David McKee and Karl Pearson)

FALL ON ROCK, FAILURE TO FOLLOW ROUTE, EXCEEDING ABILITIES

Colorado, Rocky Mountain National Park, The Book

On August 15, 1994, about 1500, Laura Grignon (29) slipped and fell on rock while leading what they believed to be the J Crack III 5.10a on The Book of Lumpy Ridge. She and her partner, Greg Langkamp, were actually several hundred feet to the left and above the J Crack on the Exit Wall area near Fang Ledge. Although they had already determined that they were off route, they continued to climb. Grignon was about ten feet above her last piece when she slipped and fell 20 feet. She sustained a compressed T-12 vertebrae, and was evacuated by technical litter lower by the Rocky Mountain National Park SAR Team.

Analysis

Getting off route is a commonplace occurrence in rock climbing. Climbers schooled in the "connect-the-dots" arenas of the sport climbs are often ill-prepared in dealing with complex, traditional multi-pitch routes. Because any climber should expect at some time or another to be off route, s/he should have and follow a pre-planned procedure instead of just "wandering." On multi-pitch climbs, a guidebook is a good idea for those not used to route finding. It is also good to understand the author's style before attempting to decipher it while hanging in slings. Also, one should pick a particular ability level encountered at which the decision to retreat instead of continue is made. (Source: Jim Detterline, Long's Peak Supervisory Ranger, based on original reports by Rangers S. Scot Bowen and Mitch Fong)

(Editor's Note: Of the 79 SAR missions in Rocky Mountain National Park in 1994, 20 involved climbers. These include reports of overdue climbers, which often end up as unfounded. They cost time and money, but are not considered to be accidents.)

FALL ON ROCK, PROTECTION PULLED OUT, NO HARD HAT

Colorado, Eldorado Canyon State Park, Red Garden Wall

On September 10, 1994, a climber (30) was leading on "Blackwalk" (5.10b/c) on Red Garden Wall. He was 30 feet off the ground and five feet above his last and only piece of protection. He slipped and fell, pulling the 2½ inch Friend out. He hit his head on a

rock when reaching the ground (no helmet). The belayer said that the victim was a 5.12 climber with years of experience. He sustained a broken hip, collarbone and ribs, and fractured skull—but should survive. (Source: Steve Muelhauser, Park Ranger)

(Editor's Note: Eldorado State Park experiences hundreds of climbers and thousands of climber days each year because of the proximity to the large Denver-Boulder population. Currently, registration is not required. A total of twelve accidents were reported for 1994—not a large number. Three of these were bouldering falls with inadequate spotting, and one was an overdue party that ended with fatigued but uninjured climbers.)

FALLING ROCK

Missouri, Lake of the Ozarks, Truman Reservoir

On October 6, 1994, Phil Rotterman, Cary Winchester and I arrived at the bluffs that abut the Truman Reservoir. We planned to do some sport climbing on some 80 foot high limestone routes.

After I led "The Big Weenie," we moved on to "Gomerwood," which Phil led. While setting up a top-rope above, he dislodged a small cantaloupe-sized rock. He yelled, "ROCK." Cary was to my right at the base of the route. We spotted the rock immediately. It was on a line ten to 15 feet to my right. Cary and I moved farther left. I watched the rock bounce straight down the less-than-vertical face until it was ten feet above me and 15 feet to my right. It hit me in the face before I could see it change direction.

It passed in front of Cary to hit me. He thought it had continued straight down the cliff until he saw me holding my face. Bleeding profusely from a two centimeter cut over and a one centimeter cut under my right eye, I used a roll of toilet paper in my pack to apply pressure and stop the bleeding within a couple of minutes. I never lost consciousness and was able to walk out. We drove to the local clinic where the doctor on call stitched me up—five stitches below, eight above. He told me I was lucky and that I could have lost the eye if hit straight on instead of a glancing blow to the right.

This accident teaches that falling rocks can take bounces that appear to defy the laws of physics and they can hit you before you can see them, let alone react. (Source: Steve Schweiker)

(Editor's Note: Mr. Schweiker gives no indication as to how Mr. Rotterman dislodged the rock, or whether it was done in an attempt to clean the belay area. In any case, we gather they are still friends.)

HYPOTHERMIA, FROSTBITE, EXPOSURE, INADEQUATE CLOTHING AND EQUIPMENT, FAILURE TO TURN BACK, PARTY SEPARATED, EXCEEDING ABILITIES—INEXPERIENCE, WEATHER

New Hampshire, Mount Jefferson and Mount Washington

On January 14, 1994, Derek Tinkham (20) and Jeremy Haas (20), both students at the University of New Hampshire, set out for a planned traverse of the Presidential Range. They camped, actually a bivouac, as they had no tent, the first night, and continued up the next day, Saturday, in extreme cold weather and wind. High on Mount Jefferson, Haas left Tinkham, who was suffering from hypothermia, in a sleeping bag. He took his mittens off to do this, and lost them in the wind. Haas continued on to the summit of