

Buttress Route (II, 5.7+) on Thunder Buttress, Lumpy Ridge. On the third and final pitch, Brooks was swiftly leading lower fifth class rock near the top of the formation when a right handhold broke. Brooks plummeted 60 feet down the rock face, pulling one piece of protection—a #3 TriCam—and impacting four times. Miller's belay caught Brooks when he reached his next protection, a #1 Wild Country Friend. As a result of the impacts, Brooks fractured his pelvis on his left side. His chief complaint at the time of the injury was intense pain in the left leg from his buttocks to his toes, and a complete loss of mobility and motion with the left leg. Miller lowered Brooks back to the belay, anchored him, and went down to get RMNP rescue, returning with the team to assist his partner.

### **Analysis**

Brooks and Miller were both experienced climbers. Brooks had been climbing for about ten years, and led rock consistently at the 5.10 to 5.11 level. He had extensive experience on Lumpy Ridge. Brooks blamed his accident on carelessness and inattention, and said that he was moving too fast on the easy rock with thoughts of topping out on the climb foremost in his mind. He did not test the failed handhold, but instead had instantly weighted it, causing him to lose balance when that hold broke loose.

Brooks was wearing a helmet, and attributed this to a lack of any kind of head injuries or loss of consciousness, despite striking his head during the fall. (Source: Jim Detterline, Longs Peak Supervisory Climbing Ranger)

## **FALL ON ROCK—BLOWN OFF BY WIND GUST, INADEQUATE PROTECTION and PARTNER STRANDED—INEXPERIENCE**

### **Colorado, Rocky Mountain National Park, Petit Grepon**

On July 2, Todd Marshall (34) was leading the seventh pitch of Petit Grepon South Face (III, 5.8). At 1900, Marshall topped out on the spur ledge below the summit, stood up with arms upraised, and gave a, "Hurray," and got blown off by a strong gust of wind from the southeast estimated at 60-70 mph by his partner, Matteo Baceda. Marshall fell 70 feet and struck the rock face, sustaining a massive depressed occipital skull fracture, and instant death. Baceda was unfamiliar with self-rescue techniques and remained trapped on his belay ledge 80 feet below Marshall. Baceda sustained exposure to his lips from being stuck out overnight. Baceda was rescued by two climbers during the following afternoon.

### **Analysis**

Marshall, with six years of climbing experience and a prior ascent of Petit Grepon South Face, was the leader of this team and led every pitch. This party was out so late in the day because Marshall and Baceda, during their pre-dawn approach from the Glacier Gorge trailhead, took a wrong turn in the dark and ended up at the base of Spearhead, approximately seven miles away from the Grepon. Marshall was climbing quickly and strongly while leading the Grepon, but he took a 30 foot runout from his last protection, a #2 Camalot, which held his fall. The strong erratic winds encountered were not a surprise to Marshall and Baceda, who had witnessed similar winds all day. Turning back is an option, but at the very least Marshall should have clipped into the belay before standing up on the ledge. Marshall was not wearing a helmet, and the impact area on the back of his head would have been covered. However, considering the distance fallen and the force produced, it is not clear if he could have survived. (Source: Jim Detterline, Longs Peak Supervisory Climbing Ranger)