

FALLING ROCK, POOR POSITION

Colorado, Eldorado State Park

On February 22, a thirty year old female climber was walking along the base of the Rincon Wall when she was struck on the right forearm by a falling rock about the size of a climbing helmet. Her only warning came too late from a party of climbers directly above her. The rock had been dislodged by another party further above who failed to provide any verbal warning. The victim sustained some bruises and was assisted by her climbing partner and a nurse who was climbing nearby.

Analysis

In heavily trafficked areas especially, climbers must provide immediate and clearly audible warning to anyone in the surrounding area if they dislodge a rock. Conversely, climbers should consider their position beneath another climbing party—unless they knowingly assume the associated risks. Hikers in a climbing area should also be on the alert for falling objects and avoid walking directly beneath climbing routes. A helmet is certainly a good idea when in a place where falling rocks and/or objects are a possibility. (Source: Steve Muelhauser, Park Manager, and Conrad Bieniulis, Seasonal Park Ranger)

FALL ON ICE, INADEQUATE KNOT

Colorado, Ouray Ice Park

On March 19, Greg Kowalsky (age unknown) fell 70 feet when his knot came undone as he was preparing to be lowered by his partner who was belaying him from the ground.

Despite efforts of emergency crews and four nearby climbers, Kowalsky succumbed to his multiple injuries. (Source: *The Ridgeway Sun*, Week of March 19–25, 1998)

(Editor's Note: This park was featured on the cover of last year's ANAM journal. Though this was the first fatality in the four years of operation of the facility, many stories of "near misses" involving similar problems are passing down the grapevine. It's a place where many individuals are trying ice climbing for the first time.)

FALL ON ROCK, DESCENDING UNROPED, NO HELMET

Colorado, Eldorado State Park

On March 25, a thirty-two year old female experienced climber and her partner had just completed the first pitch of Blind Faith (5.10) on the west side of the Bastille. Rather than continuing up the route or rigging a rappel, they decided to unrope and down-climb a somewhat loose, broken cleft in the cliff. During the down-climb the victim fell, falling about 50 feet to the ground. She was not tied into a rope and had no helmet on at the time. She suffered multiple lacerations to her forehead, right hand, and right ankle as well as a loss of sensation below her waist. She was later diagnosed to have fractured her spine and damaged her spinal cord. (Source: Steve Muelhauser, Park Manager, and Conrad Bieniulis, Seasonal Park Ranger)