

Analysis

The descent route on Little Twin Owls is both ascended and descended by countless numbers of climbers every year and is as clean and solid as any route gets. This accident emphasizes the need to test holds as a matter of routine procedure before weighting them, even though it doesn't guarantee that you won't dislodge a loose rock. Mr. Pollack is to be commended for executing the evasive maneuver back to the ledge that probably saved his life, although it is unfortunate that he still sustained serious injuries.

Questions may be raised regarding the appropriateness of climbing unroped on this easy route. The answers are not so definitive. A rope may have allowed Mr. Pollack to jump safely away, but possibly it would also have kept him in the direct line of the falling rock, allowed for leader fall injuries, allowed for the rope to be struck and broken, and/or potentially have placed a belayer in grave danger. (Source: Jim Detterline, Longs Peak Ranger)

EXHAUSTION – UNABLE TO DESCEND, DEHYDRATION, EXCEEDING ABILITIES

Colorado, Rocky Mountain National Park, Longs Peak

On September 1, a Colorado Mountain School guide reported to park rangers that Tim Ashwood (40), a climber with cerebral palsy who had been on the Diamond of Longs Peak for eight days, was ill and would need assistance in descending on the following morning. Ashwood was assisted by partners Jim Thurman and Matt Bliss in jumarring up the Diamond. Park rangers responded on September 2 with a horse to evacuate Ashwood to Longs Peak Trailhead, where he was transported by ambulance to Estes Park Medical Center. Ashwood was suffering from low energy levels, nausea, and dehydration. He was treated with four liters of IV fluid.

Analysis

While Ashwood is to be commended for his perseverance in attempting the realization of his dream—a climb of the Diamond—the nature of his condition and the inability of Ashwood and his partners to manage his energy levels and hydration were the primary causes of this incident. Contributory causes discovered by investigating park rangers included an obsessive desire of Ashwood in wanting to complete this climb at any cost. He had already failed several times. Also, there was commercial interest on the part of Ashwood's partners, amateur guides intending to profit from the publicity they got for hosting the climb. (Source: Jim Detterline, Longs Peak Ranger)

FALL ON ICE, INADEQUATE PROTECTION, POOR TOOL PLACEMENT, EXCEEDING ABILITIES

Colorado, Rocky Mountain National Park, Hidden Falls

On December 20, Ben Johnson (21) was leading Hidden Falls Left (I, WI, 3+) belayed by Krys Obrzut. Johnson climbed the first steep step to the ledge and placed the only screw he used on the route. Johnson continued up the vertical face and was climbing confidently and aggressively. He was attempting to make

the transition from the vertical to the belay ledge when his accident occurred. Johnson had one and possibly both hand tools placed on an upward facing edge/flake of ice about 1.5 feet long by two inches thick. As he stepped high with his left foot, the weight transferred to the hand tools broke the ice flake. Johnson tumbled backward and upside down, striking the ledge with his right shoulder, which took most of the force, and then struck his head. Johnson then flew over the first step but came to rest four to five feet from hitting the ground, finally caught up by his ice screw and belayer. The total length of the fall was 60 feet. Johnson sustained a fractured scapula, collapsed lung, and minor head injuries.

Analysis

Contributing factors in this fall include poor hand tool placements, relying with too many points on a thin and water-weakened ice feature (the flake), overly aggressive climbing style and attitude, inexperience, insufficient protection (only one screw) and nothing to prevent an impact fall to the ledge. The ice flake may have been weakened by water flowing from above in greater than normal amounts due to an illegal ditching operation by a local climber.

Johnson was wearing a Petzl Rockhelmet, which may be credited with minimizing his head injuries. He was knocked unconscious, sustained a forehead laceration from hitting the sharp edge of the helmet, and went into convulsions, but he did not suffer a concussion. (Source: Jim Detterline, Longs Peak Ranger) *(Editor's Note: There were no accidents in Eldorado Canyon this year. However, I received several brief reports on incidents in Boulder Canyon, Flatirons, and Mt. Sanitas, forwarded by Bill May. These mostly involved bouldering. Attention was also called to the avalanche fatalities involving hikers. One lengthy—6,000 word—report gleaned from the internet and entitled "Death and Transfiguration" told of a serious fall due to inadequate protection (belayer and rappel anchors) on Green Mountain Pinnacle. The website is www.geocites.com)*

VARIOUS FALLS ON ROCK, PROTECTION PULLED OUT, ROCK FLAKE (HANDHOLD) CAME OUT, STRANDED

Idaho, City of Rocks National Reserve, Various Routes

There were six climbing incidents reported from this area. Five involved falls from routes, and in three of those, protection came out. In one case, the climber couldn't clip in to a bolt hanger. One climber became stranded while he was free soloing due to a sudden storm. The average age for the victims was late twenties, all experienced.

Analysis

We had no reported climbing accidents in 1997 and only one in 1998. Due to the nature of climbing at the City of Rocks—long response times by ambulance and close proximity to vehicles—there are undoubtedly many climbing accidents that go unreported.

A refreshing trend here is that folks seem to have stopped dropping each other! We haven't had a belay failure for several years. What we have seen however is an increase in protection failure on traditional climbs. My guess is that this is due, at least in part, to renewed interest in clean climbing as the pendu-