

attempt on Longs Peak with two other companions starting at the Longs Peak Trailhead. They had intended to complete their ascent within one day and were not equipped to stay out overnight. At 1030, the solo mountaineer separated from his group at the Keyhole Formation (13,100 feet above sea level), and continued on alone, in a snowstorm, towards the summit. Two mountaineers descending the Keyhole Route saw him at the base of the Homestretch, and later said that he did not appear to be in any difficulty.

The blizzard intensified with winds up to 60 mph, low temperatures to 5 degrees F, lightning, low visibility, and snow accumulations of up to six inches. The solo mountaineer's friends left the area and at 1627 reported him as missing/overdue to Rocky Mountain National Park Communications Center.

On September 5, a park ranger found his body on the summit of Longs Peak. He was lightly dressed in a hooded sweatshirt over a T-shirt, blue jeans, wool gloves, cotton socks, and sneakers. There was no extra clothing in his pack. He had a cell phone in the pocket of his sweatshirt, and although he may have attempted to call out, there was no record of his call with any of the surrounding 911 emergency communications centers. The cause of death was exposure.

### **Analysis**

This fellow had unsuccessfully attempted Longs Peak via the Keyhole Route on two earlier occasions in 2004. In interviewing friends and mountaineers who had contact with him on the mountain, the investigator concluded that he apparently had a case of being goal oriented. He was inexperienced but apparently had great mental drive to get him to where he wanted to go. It is not known for certain why he did not attempt to descend.

He was inadequately clothed and equipped for winter conditions and a technical ascent. He failed to heed the advice of available literature and bulletins, friends, fellow mountaineers, and even park staff.

This was only the second year since the 1868 first-reported ascent of Longs Peak that the Keyhole Route was not rated as a non-technical hike at any time. Rangers had posted current peak conditions and weather forecasts at the Longs Peak Trailhead, advising of the "technical" conditions and the incoming blizzard. (Source: From a report submitted by Jim Detterline and Rich Perch, Park Rangers in Rocky Mountain National Park, and the *Rocky Mountain News*, September 8, 2004)

## **FALL ON ROCK—OFF ROUTE, DARKNESS**

### **Colorado, Eldorado Canyon, Anthill Direct**

On October 21, Angus McInnes (39) and his companion, a young Russian man (17) who had emigrated with his family to the U.S. four months earlier, were climbing Anthill Direct (5.9) when apparently they got off route.

McInnes was experienced, but he had not climbed the route previously. As daylight faded with the crux still ahead, McInnes started looking for a descent route. Instead of rappelling from their current anchor point, he decided to work left, perhaps in hope of gaining access to the easier route Red Guard in order to complete the climb.

The second lost sight of McInnes, who soon yelled, "Watch me." Shortly after, the second felt the leader pull lots of slack. Moments passed and then the rope came taut. The second radioed and yelled to McInnes but got no reply. The second did not know how to tie off the taut rope, so he began lowering the leader. After feeding several feet of rope, he felt his partner come to a stop. The second then removed the rope from his belay device, tied the rope off, and yelled for help.

Bystanders reported hearing cries for help from climbers 350 feet above the ground. RMRG was in the middle of another climbing rescue on the Flatirons to the north, but responded along with several other agencies. The second spoke limited English, which combined with darkness, slowed the rescue. Only when rescuers arrived at the position of the second did they find out about the predicament of the leader. Another rescuer rappelled 50 feet west and found the leader who was deceased. He was several feet down a gully with a hex from his gear sling caught in a crack. The gear sling was around his neck and positioned in a way that restricted his breathing. There was also a laceration under his helmet on the left side, but the coroner determined the cause of death was asphyxiation.

RMRG assisted the second off the cliff and evacuated the body of the leader that night, finishing at 0330 hours. It took a total of eight hours and required 45 rescuers from RMRG and several other agencies.

### **Analysis**

The victims were climbing very late in the day and may have felt pressed by the rapidly fading light. By climbing off route, the lead climber entered unknown ground which quickly became very difficult. Sometimes it is better to continue with the plan you started with, or a safer bet may be to rappel. The lead climber was probably unconscious after his fall, thus could not respond to the second's attempt at communicating. Unable to communicate and with rapidly approaching darkness, the inexperienced second decided to lower McInnes. (Source: From a report by the Rocky Mountain Rescue Group)

*(Editor's Note: Two other fatalities and one serious injury were a result of separate incidents at Boulder Canyon in October. This popular area is attracting scramblers. They see climbers and want to give it a try themselves.)*

*There was a fatality on Snowmass Peak—14,092'—in June. The victim, Mark Golden, 32, was probably trying to find a "shortcut" on the way down. He fell about 2,000 feet. This is normally a mountain one climbs by hiking on trails, as the rock is not good for climbing.)*