

FALL ON ROCK, INADEQUATE BELAY—ROPE RAN OUT

Colorado, Boulder Canyon, Animation

On May 24, Eric Gurvin (19) sustained injuries to his back, ankles, and wrist when he fell 20 to 30 feet when the person lowering him ran out of rope and dropped him.

He had finished climbing a 5.9 route in Boulder Canyon known as Animation and was being lowered to the ground from a top rope about 4:00 p.m. There was another climber with them.

Analysis

As he was being lowered, Gurvin's belayer was unaware that the end of the rope was approaching and allowed it to slip through the belay device used to slow the descent.

This cliff has a number of routes longer than 30 meters per pitch. Thus, it sets up folks who climb with 60-meter ropes to need a second rope. Many sport climbers these days do not bring a second rope. (Source: Edited from an article in the *Boulder Daily Camera*, with added comment by Leo Paik)

FALL ON SNOW, WEATHER, GEOLOGY

Colorado, Maroon Bells, Bell Cord Couloir

On May 30, Kip Ryan White (49), an experienced climber and indie singer-songwriter, died in a fall in the saddle between North and South Maroon Peaks outside Aspen. White and his son Jordan (19) fell 400 feet while descending the 50-degree, narrow, east-facing Bell Cord Couloir. The climbers were belaying one another, unanchored, when one of them lost purchase. Jordan, knocked unconscious, with his helmet split open on a rock, awoke moments after the accident to find his father 40 feet downhill and already dead.

Suffering from a mild head injury himself, Jordan down-climbed 600 feet of steep terrain before beginning a two-mile descent to Maroon Lake. He spent a cold, exposed night under a patch of trees before hiking out early Tuesday morning to drive his father's truck to the Aspen Valley Hospital.

Analysis

The Bells have a grim history. "There used to be several fatalities a year," Lou Dawson, a prolific climber and guru of Colorado fourteeners, told the *Aspen Daily News*. "A rope is problematic if the rock is loose because there's no place to anchor it." The notoriously loose Bells have claimed other local mountaineers, including Greg Mace, a prominent member of Aspen Mountain Rescue. The relative danger of the Bells, coupled with their easy access, have led the U.S. Forest Service and Mountain Rescue Aspen to call them the "Deadly Bells" as a warning.

Mountain Rescue Aspen believes that the weekend's poor weather contributed to unfavorable snow conditions—a thin crust layer over several

inches of mush—causing the father-and-son team great difficulty in self-arresting once their fall began. “You just keep sliding,” Dawson told the newspaper. “That’s what happened to Greg Mace, and he knew what he was doing.”

Kip White had summited numerous fourteeners since moving to Colorado in 1979. The father-and-son team had endeavored to be cautious on South Maroon Peak, and turned back at the 13,800-foot saddle because of deteriorating weather. (Source: Edited from a report by Courtney Belcher, news@bigstonepub.com)

FALL ON ROCK—INADEQUATE PROTECTION, OFF ROUTE, INEXPERIENCE

Colorado, Boulder Canyon, Eagle Rock

On June 5, J.H. (20) and Z.T. (20) were climbing the Great Dihedral, a 3-pitch, 5.5 trad route in the infrequently climbed Eagle Rock area of Boulder Canyon.

J.H. began leading the second pitch, which the website describes as: “Climb slabby rock with little pro as it steepens... you will see a fixed pin under a large roof, don’t go that high but traverse left on scary moderate ledge to a slab that brings you up and left and into the dihedral (scary moves above tricky pro)...”

He fell 60 feet before Z.T. caught him on belay. J.H. impacted the rock face and sustained a compound tib/fib fracture, a maxillary nose fracture, and multiple cuts and bruises.

Analysis

J.H. did not traverse left as described and had difficulty finding gear placements. He unknowingly climbed off route to clip a series of three fixed pins under the large roof. He used very short quickdraws rather than long runners, which created a high degree of rope drag as he traversed left into the dihedral. Here again, J.H. had difficulty finding gear placements. He spent several minutes trying to place a micro-nut, but ultimately gave up. The slabby face above seemed relatively easy and J.H. could make out a ledge where he assumed the bolt anchor would be. He decided to “run it out” on this section and 10 to 15 feet below the ledge he slipped.

The climbers lacked adequate information on the difficulty of the climb, in terms of both rating and gear placement. First, novice leaders should ensure that they select climbs well within their limits. Multiple sources of information would have been very helpful in this case. Second, climbers transitioning from sport to trad may often be accustomed to following a bolt line, and therefore face route-finding challenges. Third, recognizing when and where long runners should be used can also be problematic for sport climbers. In this case, the use of quickdraws created severe rope drag