

At the scene, a man (29) was found on a ledge near the base of a climbing area called the Boulderado. Witnesses said that the climber (29) was setting up a “top-rope” and was seen beginning to rappel from the top of the climb. After he lowered himself about ten feet, the rope anchor failed and he fell about 70–100 feet. During the fall, his rope became tangled in a small tree growing out of the rock face. This stopped his fall about five feet above the ledge. Witnesses cut the rope in order to allow them to lower him to the ground.

From the ledge, the Rocky Mountain Rescue Group conducted a vertical evacuation of about 50 feet to the road. The victim was then transported to a waiting Flight for Life helicopter and was flown to St. Anthony’s Central Hospital with serious injuries.

Analysis

The exact mechanism of the rope anchor failure is unknown, however, a rock, weighing an estimated 250 pounds, was found at the top of the climb that had been very recently dislodged. The rock was resting precariously near the edge of the rock face above the climbing area and vehicle traffic below. After the rescue operation was complete and all people and vehicles moved out of the area, the rock was pushed over the edge to eliminate it as a future safety concern. (Source: Edited from a report from the Boulder County Sheriff’s Office)

(Editor’s Note: This year there were several incidents involving this kind of anchor problem or lowering problem in Eldorado and Boulder Canyon. A few of the typical ones have been reported here. There was also a fatality at Garden of the Gods, but no pertinent details were available.)

FALL ON ROCK, FALLING ROCK—CLIMBER STANDING ON LARGE ROCK WHEN IT CAME LOOSE, CLIMBING UNROPED

Colorado, Little Bear, Northwest Face

On July 2 about 10:00 a.m., an experienced climber died from a fall taken from the upper headwall (just below the Blanca-Little Bear ridge) of the Northwest Face route on Little Bear. The party he was in was not roped at the time. He tried to move on a large rock that appeared to be solid. It came off on top of him. The initial fall was about 20 feet, but he continued to tumble down for about 300–400 feet. He died during the fall/tumble from multiple head contusions (though he was wearing a Petzl Ecrin Rock helmet), severe internal injuries, and severely broken extremities (including neck).

The rescue-turned-recovery operation began almost immediately due to radio communications available in the area. His partners reached him about 20 minutes before assistance arrived. A nurse and an experienced SAR member concurred that he was deceased.

The recovery operation began immediately. The body was lowered 700–800 feet to the scree field below the lower headwall where the county SAR team took over from the climbers. Sleet and rain hampered the operation, in particular over the waterfall in the gully north of the “Black Hand.” The body was then driven out by one of the SAR team members. The operation was wrapped up at about 10:00 p.m. His partners were uninjured. (Source: From a report by Theo Barker, SAR member who happened to be nearby. His wife is the nurse mentioned)

FALL ON ROCK, OFF ROUTE, INADEQUATE BELAY

Colorado, Eldorado Canyon State Park, Red Garden Wall

On July 13 a climber (37) took a 100-foot fall on the Red Garden wall in Eldorado Springs before his partner managed to control the rope, stopping his partner’s descent about ten feet above a rock ledge. The climber suffered minor head injuries and cuts, Boulder County sheriff’s deputies said. He was taken to Boulder Community Hospital.

His climbing partner, Nick Saylor (19), said the man was an experienced climber who slipped after getting off route. Saylor, whose hands were bandaged by rescuers on scene, said he was climbing above his partner and it took him several seconds to stop the rope.

“The rope just went right through my hands,” Saylor said. “I guess you can see the bones.” Saylor was able to lower his friend to the ledge and yell for help until someone called 911. It took rescuers an hour and 10 minutes to get the climber safely to the ground. (Source: From various postings at the website <http://mountainproject.com>)

Analysis

The most interesting aspect of this incident has to do with the belay. There are not enough details, but we are seeing more and more incidents having to do with belayers “losing control” of the rope. The lesson is to review the very basics of belay techniques. (Source: Jed Williamson)

FALL ON SNOW, CLIMBING UNROPED, INEXPERIENCED

Colorado, Longs Peak, Lamb’s Slide

On August 19, Ben Cort (age unknown) was climbing Lamb’s Slide with two friends. When Cort was at the top, he lost his footing and fell some 800 feet. “The next thing you know I was just flying down the mountain without my ice ax,” he said. “That’s when it gets bad.” Traveling at speeds witnesses estimate were near 40 mph, Cort stayed conscious for the entire fall. “Total pandemonium,” he said. “I was head over heels and I was smacking my face on rocks. Rocks were coming down with me and then this boulder rolled over me a couple times.” When Cort reached the bottom, he initially thought he was dead. “There was a very, very distinct feeling