

It is often easier and safer to free the ropes from just above, where you can easily inspect the jam. Freeing the ropes from the top down also eliminates the chance of dislodging a rock, although there is still the risk knocking rocks onto anyone below. Also, resist the temptation to yank aggressively on the ropes to free them. In most cases, tugging on the ropes will only set the jam even tighter, or, as evidenced by this accident, dislodge rock. Carefully finesse the ropes from above. (Source: Edited from an article in *Rock and Ice*, #148, by Duane Raleigh, Editor)

FALLING ROCK—PULLED LOOSE BY CLIMBING ROPES

Colorado, Rocky Mountain National Park, Lumpy Ridge

On August 8, two climbers were descending from a completed climb of Batman Pinnacle. The climbers were rappelling down a loose, talus-filled gully when their rope got stuck. One of the two, (36), scrambled back up the gully to try and dislodge the rope. As he was pulling on the end of the rope, a large boulder dislodged and fell onto his right lower leg. The boulder momentarily pinned his leg against the sidewall of the gully and continued to roll down the hillside. He suffered severe trauma to his right lower leg. Park Dispatch was notified by cell phone of the accident at approximately 11:45 a.m.

Eighteen NPS rescue personnel responded to the accident site. One NPS employee, who is an air ambulance flight nurse during the winter season, worked with Park Medics to stabilize the patient and render medical care. The man's injuries were life threatening and presented rescue personnel with a true medical emergency. Numerous bags of IV fluid were used during treatment due to severe blood loss.

The rescue was very technically demanding and required a short vertical lowering, followed by several hundred feet of loose, low angle terrain. The lower angle terrain required rescuers to pass the litter hand-over-hand across loose talus fields. A Flight For Life helicopter was able to transport the man to a hospital after rescuers carried him for several hours to an open meadow.

Analysis

Lumpy Ridge is an extremely popular rock climbing area in RMNP during the spring, summer, and fall. Some of the finest sub-alpine granite in the United States is found here. However, Lumpy Ridge is infamous for two things: flared cracks that are difficult to climb and protect, and long, arduous, scree and talus-filled descent gullies. This man was the victim of the latter, and while no climber can predict when a loose rock will fall, there are some important points to emphasize regarding climbing and descending safely at Lumpy Ridge.

Loose Descent Gullies. Lumpy Ridge rock climbs are plagued by long, complex descents where loose scree and talus mix with small cliff bands and

vegetation. Negotiating this terrain safely after a long hard multi-pitch climb takes great care and patience. While descending these areas, climbers should space themselves to avoid accidentally kicking loose rock and debris onto each other. Descend on independent lines, if possible, or consider tackling some sections one at a time. Loose rock is loose rock, but if care and patience are exercised during the descent, accident potential can be minimized.

Rappel or Down-Climb? The decision to rappel off of a climbing route or down-climb is often obvious due to the severity of terrain; however, sometimes you have the option to choose one or the other. It is important to consider the pros and cons of each and make your decision based on safety considerations and not necessarily on what will be easier or more convenient. At Lumpy Ridge it is often tempting to rappel down all or parts of some of the horribly loose gullies to avoid having to deal with the time consuming task of carefully down-climbing through the rubble. This is often quicker and easier and less mentally taxing. Nevertheless, be sure to consider the cons of such a decision. Rappelling is one of the most dangerous things we do as climbers, so the decision should not be taken lightly. Will the rope knock debris down onto you or your partners as you make your rappel? Will the rope knock debris down onto you or your partners when you pull it for the next rappel? Given that the terrain is low angled and complex, what are the odds that the rope will get stuck when you pull it? Is there a way we can walk around this section so we don't have to rappel? Are the anchors solid? Sometimes the answer to these questions will still lead to a decision to rappel. At Lumpy Ridge, however, make sure you make that decision thoughtfully. (Source: RMNP Rangers)

FALL ON ROCK, FAILURE TO FOLLOW ROUTE, CLIMBING ALONE, FATIGUE Colorado, Rocky Mountain National Park, Longs Peak

On August 19 about 7:30 a.m., RMNP Dispatch received a cellphone call from a visitor reporting an accident and requesting help on Longs Peak. The reporting party indicated that they were on the Ledges of the Keyhole Route with a woman who had fallen the previous evening and spent the night out alone. The caller stated that she had taken a 200-foot tumbling fall and suffered a severe head injury. The injured woman also told the caller that she had lost consciousness at some point during the night. When rescuers arrived on scene, the woman was shivering uncontrollably and showing initial signs of hypothermia.

Due to the unavailability of helicopter resources, approximately 32 NPS rescuers responded up the six miles of trail and additional mile of 3rd Class terrain to assist with the evacuation effort. The NPS rescuers were assisted by seven Larimer County Search and Rescue personnel and several on-scene visitors.