

FALL OR SLIP ON ROCK, MISCOMMUNICATION

Colorado, Eldorado Canyon State Park, Wind Tower

On May 4, Lon Abbott (45) and Avery McGill (25) were climbing Recon (5.6) on the Wind Tower. Both men were experienced climbers and wearing helmets. They had been leading, then rappelling all day. During the afternoon Abbott fell from the anchors on top of the first pitch, stopping about 20-30 feet below the belay ledge. Reports suggest that Abbott was tied into the rope while it was under tension from the anchor at the top of the first pitch as it passed through the chains (or the injured climber's gear), down and through a few more pieces, then down to the base of the climb. Abbott had called, "Off belay!" and was not on belay when he fell.

At the on-set of the fall, McGill thought there was rockfall and took shelter underneath an outcrop. When he realized Abbott was falling, he tried to grab the rope but couldn't hold on to it. He suffered a hand injury, suggesting that Abbott fell onto his hand.

Luckily for Abbott, the rope got caught or twisted in the first piece of protection on the pitch, which appeared to "arrest" the fall keeping him from tumbling further down the 4th class slope.

Quick action from climbers in the area saved Abbott's life. He was air lifted to Denver Health Medical Center where his injuries were assessed and included two broken vertebrae, broken ankles, five broken ribs, a broken shoulder blade and a concussion. He is expected to recover.

Analysis

Experienced climbers will often keep the leader on belay when he reaches the top of a pitch, even if he says, "Off belay." This is followed by giving a few feet of slack and then tying a knot in the rope on the brake side of the belay device until it becomes evident that the leader is tied off to the anchor.

Since Abbott and McGill had been leading and rappelling all day, they may not have talked about changing what they had been doing. Instead, McGill may have assumed that they would continue, which leads to the speculation that after leading the pitch Abbott, decided to lower instead of rappelling, but forgot to communicate this with McGill.

There is also some speculation that the "off belay" command did not come from Abbott, but from another party in the immediate area. Whatever happened, it's a good time to remind us all that we should always communicate with our partners. (Source: Edited from entries on mountainproject.com and rockymountainnews.com websites)

FALL OR SLIP ON ROCK, PULLED LOOSE ROCK OFF – FALLING ROCK HIT CLIMBING PARTNER

Colorado, Eldorado Canyon State Park, Doub-Griffith

During the afternoon on May 27, two experienced climbers, Chris Lee

(38) and Chris Klinga (25) were attempting Doub-Griffith, a 5.11c 3-pitch traditional route that starts from a small ledge 150 feet above the base of Redgarden Wall. As Lee was climbing, he inadvertently pulled a large, table-sized flake free from the wall. The rock hit Lee in the abdomen, causing both Lee and the flake to fall. Using a Cinch auto-locking belay device, Klinga stopped Lee's fall after which Klinga was struck with the rock that had broken loose, injuring both his legs. Lee was able to get to the ground and walk out on his own.

Rocky Mountain Fire and Rocky Mountain Rescue climbed to Klinga's location and set up an evacuation system. The team evacuated Klinga off of the rock ledge and down to the road. The evacuation included a 150-foot vertical and a 300-foot scree lowers. Klinga was transported to St. Anthony's Central by a medical helicopter.

Analysis

Loose rock is relatively common objective hazard. Climbers should be wary of loose rock by testing handholds, avoiding sections of loose rock, and not being in a direct line of potential rockfall from above. Climbers should also ask themselves, "What if?" In this case, what sorts of precautions can be taken by the belayer to protect the leader if the belayer is incapacitated during a leader fall? (Source: From rockymountainnews and bouldercounty.org websites and Aram Attarian)

FALL ON ROCK, PROTECTION PULLED OUT

Colorado, Eldorado Canyon State Park, Bastille, Werk Supp

On July 14, Preston Brennan (47), an experienced climber, and his partner were climbing Werk Supp, a 5.9 route located on the Bastille. Witnesses noted that while on the first part of the climb, Preston had placed two nuts and was working on the third for quite some time. He placed another about ten or so feet above the third. While placing the fifth piece, he lost his grip and fell, hitting the left side of his forehead on rock and losing consciousness for the rest of the fall, since he made no sound and came down "like a rag doll". Two of the nuts pulled. He fell at least 50 feet suffering serious brain injuries, which eventually led to his death a week later. (Source: H. Urie, *The Daily Camera*, July 19, and a series of postings on mountainproject.com)

FALL OR SLIP ON ROCK, CLIMBING ALONE

Colorado, Eldorado Canyon State Park, Bastille, Werk Supp

Michael Hankins (47), an experienced and highly regarded climber from Oklahoma set out to solo Werk Supp (5.9) on July 22. He fell when he was 50 feet into the climb. Hankins was airlifted to St. Anthony Central Hospital in Denver. He suffered compound fractures to both his legs and left arm, a broken pelvis and brain injury. He later died from his injuries.