

I'm a competent belayer, but I was looking up at Mike and chatting with the other climbers, who were to my left and a little behind me. I became distracted long enough to forget about the end of the rope. (Source: Betsey, Mike, and John Dill, NPS Ranger)

(Editor's Note: There were many more incidents in Yosemite than appear here. The good news is that there were no serious bouldering mishaps. The bad news is that there was a total of 19 leader fall accidents, 11 cases involving rappelling, belay errors, rockfall, etc. A serious rockfall—200-pound block—struck one climber on Tangerine trip in December, resulting in a two-day rescue operation. Not all of them made it into Table III because not enough details were available. Special thanks to John Dill and Jesse McGahey, Yosemite rangers, for their assiduous work in compiling and following up on incidents, including interviewing climbers involved.)

FALL ON ICE, ICE PILLAR FRACTURED

Colorado, Vail, The Fang

On January 12, MM (34) and KS partnered up to climb a 35-meter pillar of ice known as The Fang (WI5). MM instructed KS on their approach where to stand for a safe belay. MM started his lead by climbing on the opposite side of the cauliflower to the base of the pillar where he set a screw and moved to the west side of the pillar. Setting another screw, MM moved back around and back cleaned his first placement. He regained the start of his line, and continued confidently up the pillar, making a few light-hearted comments about his protection and obviously having fun. MM placed approximately six screws in the pillar. He was above his last screw by about five meters and approximately 30 meters from the ground, and after placing his feet and setting his right tool, the next swing with the left, the pillar seemingly imploded below him.

The climber's hands, as reported by a close witness, were above the fracture line and the ice seemed to fall a fraction of a second before the climber. Clouded by a plume of ice dust the rest of the fall was not witnessed. He came to rest on the viewer's right, about three meters from the formation. KS reached MM within seconds and began his rapid assessment. Multiple climbers in the area began a rapid and efficient evacuation. MM was loaded into a ski area litter and lowered two 60-meter pitches of low angle snow and ice, where paramedics were met and informed of the patient's issues. It took two hours or less in total and MM arrived at Vail Valley Medical Center.

Analysis

A number of positive influences and emotions set up for a bad decision to climb The Fang on this day. A few other local friends who are experienced climbers in the area showed nothing but positive views and support for MM's interest of climbing the formation that day. Very few negative concerns were expressed. MM had been in the area consistently since early

December on essentially a full time basis. While the formation grew, he had closely been studying the conditions of the pillar. The pillar had seen two previous ascents. One ascent that MM was aware of was made by a local friend of the area. The climber had previously talked to MM about his ascent. Conditions seemed good for MM that day. He was mentally and physically prepared for the climb. The technical climbing wouldn't be the issue. Knowledge, experience and acceptable risk all played a major role in this incident. (Source: Marc Boilard, member of party and rescuer)

FALL ON ICE, BELAY DEVICE SET-UP INCORRECTLY

Colorado, Ouray Ice Park

According to reports, on February 6, a client topped out and placed his partner, a guide, on belay. In the process, the client rigged his Reverso incorrectly. Sometime during the climb the climber was being lowered and because the rope was threaded incorrectly through the belay device, the guide was dropped 40 feet, resulting in a broken pelvis along with a few other bones.

Analysis

A good practice to follow before going on belay is to do a pull test on all autoblock devices when they are in autoblock mode, even if you're sure the device is threaded the right way. (Source: www.mountainproject.com)

STRANDED, OFF ROUTE

Colorado, Eldorado Canyon State Park

On March 4, a male climber (23) and his friend began to rappel the Redguard route sometime around 7:00 p.m. They quickly realized they had descended in the wrong spot and had become stuck. They called two friends who attempted to help them, but after several hours they decided to call 911. Rocky Mountain Rescue performed a technical rescue of the two stuck climbers, and evacuated them without incident and injury.

Analysis

A better knowledge of the descent route may have prevented this incident from occurring. (Source: Boulder County Sheriff's Department)

FALL ON ROCK, NO HARD HAT

Colorado, Boulder Falls

During the afternoon on March 6, a person reported a fallen climber in the area behind Boulder Falls by flagging down a United States Forest Service employee, who in turn reported the incident by radio.

The climber, Austin Forbes (21), was located at the base of the Plotinus Wall, a popular sport climbing area. He had fallen approximately 20 feet while lead climbing, suffering a skull fracture, lung contusion, and left shoulder dislocation. Forbes had been climbing with William Hausen (19) and another