

We hope that both of them will be a bit more aggressive when providing advice to their climbing partners after this incident.

A couple of self-rescue suggestions. After a fall like Tommy's, consider providing a belay with the tag line, and even a counter-weight haul, to protect and assist your freaked-out partner as he ascends the potentially damaged lead line. In addition, Tommy was carrying both cell phones and both headlamps in the daypack. Now they each carry their own all the time. (Source: Tommy, Taylor, and John Dill, NPS Ranger)

VARIOUS FALLS ON SNOW – CAUSES INCLUDED OFF ROUTE, SEPARATED FROM GROUP, INADEQUATE FOOTWEAR (SNEAKERS), ICE AXES ON PACKS, FALLING ROCK, AND ONE HAPE FATALITY

California, Mount Shasta, Avalanche Gulch

The five climbing incidents on Mount Shasta were in the usual location: Avalanche Gulch.

The causes generally involved an inability to self-arrest or to continue on. The falling rock case resulted in a 300-foot fall and an open fracture. There was one HAPE fatality that occurred on the Clear Creek Route. Another curious fatality—not climbing-related—happened when an individual who was part of a religious/ceremonial group decided to hike on his own “to place a rock on top of the mountain.” He was eventually found in the upper Old Ski bowl area. He was wearing sweatpants and a light shirt and wore no shoes.

The climbing ranger report indicated the following: Mount Shasta had a similar season to the 2009-10 winter with a strong La Nina pattern influencing weather patterns and brought an above normal precipitation to the region. Snow accumulation was 164% of the historical average for 2011. Similar to last season, our spring was disguised with winter weather, cooler temperatures, and above normal precipitation through June. This caused late winter climbing conditions to extend into the beginning of July, which meant firm, smooth snow, making for good climbing but very dangerous if a fall is taken and self-arrest is not immediately performed successfully. As a result, the conditions were ripe for several searches and rescues. Climbing conditions remained in good shape through September. (Source: Nicklaus Meyers, US Forest Service Lead Climbing Ranger & Avalanche Specialist)

DISLODGED ROCK – FALLING ROCK

Colorado, Shelf Road

I was belaying my partner on January 16. We were climbing a new route not in the guidebook when he kicked off a baseball-sized rock from approximately 60 feet up. It made a direct hit, striking the center of my skull! Luckily I was wearing a helmet. We recognized the potential for loose rock before getting on the climb.

Analysis

My partner and I were the only climbers wearing helmets all weekend. It's your choice not to wear one. Personally I'm happy to wear one, even for casual, one-pitch sport-cragging. Head injuries can be very serious and I'd like to avoid them. If you don't own one or don't wear the one you have, maybe you should consider it. (Source: Ryan Kane from a post on mountainproject.com)

AVALANCHE, NO BELAY ANCHOR

Colorado, Ten Mile Canyon, The Shroud

During the mid-morning of January 17, while two climbers were top roping The Shroud ice climb (WI3-4), an avalanche from above the climb flowed through the area. The climber on the ice at the time was generally protected just below the top of the ice flow and the avalanche ran over him. The belayer was not anchored and was swept from his belay stance. The belayer was unable to hold the break on the belay device and slid approximately 30 feet down the rope where a knot stopped him from being carried away by the avalanche and releasing the climber above. The snow flowed over the climber and pummeled the belayer for approximately ten seconds and then continued past the climbers.

Neither party was injured or buried, as the two climbers held each other's weight at the end of the rope through the secure top-rope anchor. The slide reached the bike/ski/snowshoe path at the base of the slope approximately 400 to 500 feet below. (Source: Colorado Avalanche Information Center: avalanche.state.co.us)

Analysis

A closed belay system and a secure top rope anchor may have made a difference in the outcome of this incident. Climbers are encouraged to check avalanche reports before attempting any climb in avalanche terrain. (Source: Aram Attarian)

FALL ON SNOW, UNABLE TO SELF-ARREST, FAILURE TO TURN BACK, EXCEEDING ABILITIES

Colorado, Rocky Mountain National Park, Mount Meeker

On Saturday, January 29, Eric, Ward, Ned, Arnold and I were planning on attempting Mount Meeker (13,911 feet) via the Iron Gates route that eventually diverges from the Chasm Lake trail and follows a generally Class-2 ridge to one of the summits. The weather was gorgeous—warmer and sunnier than we possibly could have hoped—and the high winds in the area had scoured most of the alpine area around Meeker and Longs Peak clean. The snowpack was hard and stable, so for the most part, we could not punch through and we did not have to posthole through the patches of snow that we did encounter.