



Denver Leader Safety

The Safety Letter for Denver Leaders of the Colorado Mountain Club

www.hikingdenver.net

www.cmc.org

August 2011

Leader Appreciation Night – Thursday, September 22, 2011 – 6p to 9p

Because we appreciate all you do throughout the year, your Safety & Leadership Committee cordially invites all Denver Group Leaders to an evening of food, refreshments, informative talks, and individual recognition.

Look for sign up in mid-August

High Winds on Mt. Lady Washington

Mike Zyzda kindly agreed to share his story with us. He will speak more about this accident during our Leader Appreciation Night.



I was a leader of a CMC trip on Mt. Lady Washington, a 13,300' peak next to Longs in RMNP. The forecast was for 60 mph winds with gusts up to 90! Never seeing wind being predicted that high, and never trusting forecasts, I told our group that if it really was that windy we would just bail and find something else to do. As we went up the Long's peak trail, the wind was essentially the "normal speed" in that area, which is always somewhat windy. It appeared that we were in the shadow of the mountains and it was blocking the intense winds. So, we scrambled up the combination of large talus and snow slopes. It was a great day and warm for winter.

About 200' or so from the top you could tell the winds were really rocking above us. On top was chaos. The winds were strong enough to pick you up. You had to hold on to rock to not be a sail. It took forever to get in a sheltered place. Someone had an anemometer and could not hold their hand up in sustained 50+ mph winds. We started down in the shadow again with the winds getting more manageable. I was in the lead, picking our way down and at about 13,000', I turned to take a picture of the amazing scene above me with hurricane winds, snow swirling, and my fellow climbers hunkering down at times to hang on from the wind gusts. At that moment a huge gust hit me, lifted me off of my feet, and I fell about 50". I bounced 2 times with the angels protecting my fall as I eventually landed on my

backpack. It took me 4 long hours to get down the mountain with the help of the group. Three trips to the ER later, I had 1 torn and 2 partially torn knee ligaments, a torn knee tendon, and 3 blood clots. Four months later I am still slowly recovering.

Discussion

There are many things that a CMC hike leader needs to worry about. This month we take an in-depth look at one of them: wind.

Wind speed is an important consideration on any hike because it can change to a large degree throughout the course of the day, particularly on hikes above tree line. Even a relatively small gust can blow a tiny piece of grit into an unprotected eye, scratching the cornea and necessitating first aid. Faster gusts gradually increase the hazards; larger debris begins to flit about and the group’s hiking speed becomes slowed and possibly impaired. All the while wind works to suck heat from the body making the day seem colder than it actually is.

The real danger for hikers begins at approximately 40 mph. The Beaufort Scale (the wind scale used by sailors) classifies this speed as “gale”. Tree limbs may begin to break and human built structures begin to see damage. A solid 40 mph wind might be manageable except it’s usually accompanied by 50 to 60 mph gusts. In these situations most hikers will have to fight to stay upright and those carrying a large pack will have it even worse.

Higher wind speeds expose hikers to even more danger. Continuous wind speeds above 60 mph are very dangerous to unprepared hikers – the wind chill can suck heat out of otherwise adequate clothing while the force of wind dramatically slows down progress as the hikers try to find shelter.

As always, just because the leader is prepared doesn’t mean the entire group is. Whenever the leader notes a significant change in wind speed they should spend a moment to evaluate the group. Is everyone dressed adequately and, if it’s very cold, are there exposed skin surfaces that could receive frost bite? Is anyone having difficulty walking in the wind or look like they might be knocked over? Like so many other Colorado dangers, when in doubt, change your plans and hike someplace more sheltered.

Wind Speed (MPH)	Visual Indicators	Immediate Dangers	Wind Chill in the Winter (35° F)
10	Leaves, twigs in constant motion. Dry leaves are blown around.	Temperature may be slightly cooler than expected.	27° F
20	Large branches and small trees sway.	Dust/Dirt may get caught in the eye. Glasses are a good idea.	24° F
30	Whole trees moving	Hikers may find their speed of movement decreased. Climbers/scramblers will feel the wind affect their balance.	22° F
40	Whole trees in motion, difficulty walking	Hiker’s balance begins to become affected. Strong gusts can push a hiker over.	20° F
50	Trees start to break. Ground is littered with twigs.	Overall speed slows significantly as being pushed over becomes a real concern. Flying debris is a hazard.	19° F
60	Small trees uprooted	Flying debris is a real concern. Difficult to stay upright.	17° F

Special thanks to Chris Bartle (DS&L committee member) for his research on wind.

It is interesting that the family members of the father and daughter who recently died descending Missouri Mountain felt that wind was a factor in their fatal fall.

For more wind stories visit - <http://www.summitpost.org/dangerous-winds-blown-right-off-the-mountain/170697>

THE SHOCKING TRUTH

Q.} Are titanium trekking poles dangerous in a lightning storm? What do you recommend?

A.} As is so often the case, no simple answer suffices. Here's the basic truth: A lightning bolt descending from the sky is not attracted to a specific material that you're holding. You're just too small and far away. Lightning is attracted to height (the tallest thing around), location (the most isolated thing around), and shape (the pointiest thing around). Titanium trekking poles won't change your odds—unless you're standing on a high, isolated peak during a storm and holding one above your head.

Keep in mind that even though trekking poles do not attract lightning, if a bolt strikes near you, the metal may conduct the charge up from the ground—and into you—if you're using them while hiking during a storm. This conduction of ground current could be devastating to your health (and may burn any metal you're wearing, like jewelry, to your skin). To prevent the problem, carry your poles in your hand and horizontal to the ground. Even better: Find a safe spot to wait out the storm.

(Ask Buck – Backpacker Magazine)