



Denver Leader Safety

The Safety Letter for Denver Leaders of the Colorado Mountain Club

www.hikingdenver.net

www.cmc.org

June 2011



Save the Date: The annual Leader Appreciation Night will be on Thursday, September 22, 2011. Details later.



Incident reports: We now have a “Near Miss” check box on the incident report. We would like to know about your near misses. They will be treated in a less formal way. The information gathered from these near misses will help us greatly.



Correction to 1st Aide Kit: I’m bad. I forgot to add the emergency check list: <http://www.cmc.org/GlobalDocs/Emergency%20First%20Aid%20Report%20Form.pdf>

and CMC emergency numbers:

<http://www.cmc.org/members/docs/Emergency%20Call%20Service.pdf>



to Ryan Ross and all those involved in the successful Backcountry Incident Review Conference. Considering this was such an important conference and some of our leaders were unable to attend, I felt it necessary to summarize the incidents for you. The next conference is scheduled for February 11, 2012.

A SPLIT-SECOND FROM DISASTER IN CANADA



This talk was given by Rich McAdams concerning their climb of Mt. Columbia between Banff & Jasper. After conferring with the park service the group decided to go to Plan B which was a 40 mile backpack with an 8000ft gain. This was 15 miles & 2000ft more than the original plan. Upon reaching the summit, the team realized they were in fact on the false summit and began to prepare for the additional few hundred feet. Everyone was loosely roped up as they started to regroup and ascend. At 8am, as one member got to the summit, the rope was stretched out. That member suddenly vanished and sank off the edge. He had been standing on a cornice. An instinctive self arrest was performed by the other 3 which stopped the fall. The last person got out of their belay/arrest position to assess the situation and found the climber hanging and twirling in mid-air but unhurt. A Z-pulley system winched him out within 15 min. Lessons learned:

- Be flexible and listen to all members of the group. Group consensus led to an earlier departure time of 1am in an effort to mitigate avalanche risk.
- “You can teach an old dog new tricks.” Disaster was avoided considering all had planned to group up on the

summit's underlying cornice. The results would have been tragic. The rope would have been bunched up and a belay/arrest impossible with the momentum of more than 1 person falling.

- It's easy to get complacent with the vast experience of all the members. Always be astute, attentive, & aware.
- Never be afraid to learn something new.
- Talk to the "real" ranger. A key question wasn't asked of the park service personnel when inquiring about conditions; have you been on that trail? Apparently, they got their information from a junior, inexperienced, part-time employee who had never been on that trail. This caused them to take a more time consuming route which eliminated their extra day allotted for bad weather.
- Lessons relative to an average hike: A) Plan for the worst and hope for the best. B) Adapt to the environment C) Get group consensus from everyone & involve them in the discussion. D) Be willing to change to Plan B.

TRAGEDY ASCENDING RMNP GLACIER

This talk was given by Tim Hill who agreed to speak in honor of his friend, Jim Patrick who died in a fall while ascending Taylor glacier. The group arrived at the base of the glacier at 6:15a. One member decided not to climb. Options were discussed. Tim cancelled the climb and went back to the TH with the retreating member. The others decided to press on considering their high level of experience, with Jim being the most experienced. Tim stayed in contact with the climbers via 2-way radios, when at 11:20a, he was notified of Jim's fall. Tim contacted RMNP to request a rescue. He was instructed by the park service to return to the TH. He met the SAR team at 13:30. Jim tragically did not survive his fall. Tim did not give details of the accident because he was not there, but he shared with us the things that helped him during this tragedy.

- In his decision not to turn the entire group around, he yielded his judgment to the most experienced member of the group, Jim. He also knew the capabilities of the others.
- He was able to tell SAR what Jim was wearing. He knew identifying features of all the members. He even took note of the clothes, packs & helmets they were wearing.
- He stayed on the established trail on the return so SAR would find him.
- He was extremely prepared. In his pre-trip planning, he had contact information of all the members, his TH checklist, CMC emergency numbers. He made sure everyone had a radio.
- He did not let his ego cloud his judgment in retreating with the other member. "You can always come back another day."
- He knew his teammates and their abilities.

I am sure we would all like to thank Tim for his courage in talking about the loss of his good friend. We all fear this type of tragedy and wonder how we would react. His extensive and methodical planning helped him on this day. Due to requests by our members, he has consented to share his TH checklist and planning methods with us. You can open the attachment or go directly to the link:

HERDING CATS IN THE DESERT



This would be me, Deb Robak, a relatively new leader at the time, and my trusty co-leader Candy. I will include lessons learned (...) in my summary. A trip was planned to explore a very remote area near Lake Mead. Yep, remote is an understatement. It was a 2.5 hour drive and 45 min. from cell reception. This particular club did not limit the number of hikers. It does not require a pre-trip sign up, nor does the leader have a roster. (Get both anyway and limit the hike to manageable numbers) A member, Chris, asked if he could bring a couple guests. (Ask exactly how many because he showed up at the TH with 12!) We now had a group of 34. (Insanely too many) This was a two-fer hike, two separate hikes in one. We would explore a narrow slot, then get back in the cars, drive down a wash, and explore the Bowl of Fire. Fortunately, I had the guests sign waivers. (A stroke of genius that you'll see later)

Most of the guests left after the first part of the hike, including the guy that took a header on the return. His injury was significant enough to cause a bloody nose and forehead. Before we could fully assess his injuries, and to our horror, he sped off in his car, by himself, across the Vegas desert! (Always assess for head trauma and encourage the person

not to drive alone. In this case, he evaded our watchful eye. Reason #1 for the guest waiver) We now started the 2nd part of the hike with a group of 24. (Still too many) It was all off trail, wandering in and out of canyons with extensive route-finding. I was in the lead with my trusty GPS. Candy was herding the cats. At lunch I noticed one of the guests acting rather peculiar. I asked Chris what was up and he replied, "Oh, that's Pete. He has Alzheimer's disease. He wanders but always finds his way back." I said, "Not today. He is your new best friend. You are responsible for him and I do not want him to leave your side." Around 2p someone in the group alerted me to the fact that Pete was no longer with us. Apparently, short of pinning a note to Chris, I did not make myself clear enough. I asked why he wandered off. Chris replied, "He went to see a man about a horse." He wandered off while taking a privacy break and forgot to come back. Candy stayed below with the group. (When the group has the attention span of fruit flies, you need to assign someone to crowd control.) I ascended the canyon 60ft to a high point where I could survey the area. I spotted Pete about a half mile away and several canyons over. As I was yelling and waving, Chris came up and said, "You can yell all you want. He's hard of hearing." (Don't throw a hiker off a 60ft. cliff!) Eventually, Pete made it back to us while I was headed for a nervous breakdown. I subsequently called his wife (reason #2 for guest waivers with phone numbers) and alerted her to the potentially dangerous situation. The biggest lesson? Only lead hikes for the CMC.

DOUBLE TROUBLE IN RMNP COULOIR



This talk was given by Todd Nelson from the Boulder Group. This was a technical snow climb of the north face couloirs on Flattop Mt., involving 7 climbers. The group arrived at the base of the climb at 8am. The main danger was avalanche from the cornice on top. Todd usually puts the strongest in front and sweeps at the end of the group so he can keep an eye on everyone and assess the progress. Subsequent to crossing the avalanche path, one by one, all climbers continued to the top of the couloir when a climber fell and landed on a rock ledge. He could not self arrest due to the hard snow. A doctor in the group descended to examine him. After assessing his injuries it was felt it was OK to continue. However, within moments another climber lost her balance and slid 1000ft down to the base. Todd decided to go down to assess her condition. Two people at the base signaled she was OK. She got up and walked around. The first injured person was doing well and it was decided that the group would down climb.

Todd was waiting at the base when the Doctor took off her crampons and decided to glissade down. She hit a rock moat and broke her leg. They splinted her leg and eased her down to the base with a rope. The 2 strangers at the base were actually off duty ski patrollers. They called the park service and a helicopter was sent. It took 2 hrs. to get the Doctor down and an additional hour to load the helicopter.

Lessons learned:

- Advice for leaders: Keep a cool head. Watch, listen and observe. Assess all individuals.
- Reminder: Don't fall into complacency. Todd climbed this couloir at least a dozen times.

General Discussion:

- One useful tool in these scenarios was 2-way radios. These are particularly helpful when you have a large group, when the group is stretched out or separates, and in an emergency.
- All leaders, except me, were extremely prepared in all aspects of the trip. They knew their members and their abilities well.
- Asking the right question is critical and we will address assessment skills in a future newsletter.

The candor of these speakers was commendable and appreciated by all.

As always, if you have any comments or requests please email me, Deb Robak, at kaborbed@comcast.net