

Denver Safety Newsletter

June 2012

The Safety Letter for Denver Leaders of the Colorado Mountain Club



*Published by CMC Denver Safety and Leadership Committee
Deb Robak, Content Editor*

www.hikingdenver.net
www.cmc.org

Quandary Peak and "Mom Nature"

By Steve Bonowski



Mid-September until the first serious snowfall is often the golden time to climb Colorado's 14,000' peaks. The threat of summer thunderstorms is gone and the weather is generally calm and stable. Or so we thought last October 1.

There were some clouds around and the weather forecast for the Breckenridge area called for a 30% chance of thunderstorms in the afternoon. The climb went normally as is customary for the gentle east ridge approach to Quandary's summit. There was nothing obvious in the sky that would indicate a turn around as we left tree line. As we approached the flat area below the summit push, I had noticed a dark cloud forming to the east over Mt. Silverheels. This cloud turned into a modest snow squall and dropped a dusting on Hoosier Ridge and Red Peak. There was never any thunder and the cloud dissolved as it

moved towards Breckenridge. Another cloud began to form over Mt. Democrat, but seemed to be part of just some generalized thin clouds. We reached the summit of Quandary about 11:15a.

About 11:45a, as we were beginning to pack up for the descent, there was a clap of thunder over Democrat. The sky over Quandary was still thin clouds with a bit of blue sky interspersed in. We hurried down the ridge, with a fast group in front by about 200' and me bringing up the rear. At about 13,300', my whole body began to hum and buzz, even though there still was little overhead in way of deep or dark clouds. Like the old 1980s song by INXS, it was a "New Sensation."

My non-metal trekking poles were even tingling a bit. Our back end group dropped off the side to the north and squatted down; I had everyone drop their packs. Other non-CMC climbers on the mountain did the same. I was able to note that the faster group of our party also went down to the north, even though the slope wasn't steep. The idea, as we later discussed, was to get as low as possible, tough on Quandary's gentle east ridge.

Very quickly, the tingling sensation went away and there was no more thunder; just the one

clap we heard while on top. The sky above, however, was beginning to thicken as the blue areas began to fill in. We hurried down the rest of the way to tree line where we re-grouped. I learned that the group in front knew something was amiss when one person not wearing a hat had their hair shoot straight up. Their "electrical situation" disappeared as quickly as did ours higher up on the mountain. As we descended into the trees, we finally heard another sound of thunder, but very distantly to the west of Quandary.

Even for an experienced leader as me, this day offered some good reminders. Just because the weather isn't bad directly overhead, weather a couple miles away can affect you and your climb. In retrospect, there was never a clear reason to turn the group around at any time as we went up Quandary but, the second reminder is that things can change quickly.

Quandary is a wonderful peak that offers good year round access when the weather is good. My December 2011 group did not summit due to high winds that caused a turnaround at 13,300' or so. The climb on May 27 of this year was on a sunny day and went very well, although "Mom Nature" gave us a chilling wind to again remind us of her "fickle nature."

**A special thanks to Steve for sharing this story.*

Did you know?

- You should check NOAA before leaving home for an hour to hour forecast on the weather and lightning predictions.
 1. Go to www.noaa.gov.
 2. Type in the nearest town
 3. Pinpoint the nearest position of your hike on the map.
 4. Under "Additional Forecast and Information", click on Hourly Weather Graph. You'll see all kinds of information on wind, rain, thunder chances, etc.
- **Please read** the NOLS guidelines. They are posted on the CMC homepage. Click on

Leader Information : Resources : NOLS Lightning Safety Guidelines

- Lightning can strike the ground more than 25 miles from storm clouds. Blue sky overhead does not mean you're safe. Ask the golfers on the driving range at the Meadows Golf Course in Littleton. In May of 2004, there were no indications of an impending storm when lightning struck the driving range killing 1 man, injuring another and knocking several others to the ground. Analysis of the event showed it came from a very small storm 20 miles away, too far to produce audible warnings to the victims.
- If you hear thunder, in most cases, the storm is 6-8 miles away. Calculate its proximity by counting the seconds between the lightning flash and thunder. Divide that by 5 and you have the storm's distance.
- The 30/30 rule: Seek shelter when there is less than 30 seconds between lightning and thunder. Stay under cover for 30 minutes after the last lightning and thunder event.
- 50 feet is the least amount of distance needed between you and others, so multiple people don't get hit by one bolt.
- Buzzing, metal crackling and hair standing on end are all signs that a strike is imminent. Assume the crouching position with your feet close together, ideally on a foam pad or your backpack.
- The energy from one lightning bolt could supply power to several homes for a month. It can reach 50,000 ° F which is 5 times hotter than the surface of the sun. Ouch!
- A shallow cave or rock overhang is not safe. Lightning can arc when hitting rock in addition to traveling down cracks.
- "Many people have died while upright and walking to safer terrain, but no one has died while stopped in the lightning position." (NOLS Backcountry Lightning Guidelines)
- You should plan your trip to be off the summit by noon.....**Duh. You all know that one!**



Hiker Classifications: Please encourage your hikers to update their classifications. If they are classified as an A hiker but clearly are capable of a higher rating, encourage them to get their B classification. Encourage your capable B hikers to get their C rating by completing WTS and their two C hikes (one Diff C required).

No Shows: Please follow-up on your No Shows. Call them and inquire about the circumstances behind their absence. Sometimes it was a late cancelation sent electronically after you as a leader departed from your home, confusion about the meeting location, or a brain mishap. Others may need to know that, had they canceled earlier, someone on the wait list could have joined the trip in their place.

Denver Group Website: Please advise your trip members of hikingdenver.net, the Denver Group website and the useful information it contains such as:

- Safety Newsletter - Located on the homepage under "Newsletters".
- Compliments & Complaints - Located on the homepage, upper right corner.
- Mileage Reimbursement Recommendation
- Trip Classification Explanations

Trail Alerts:

Reynolds Park: Full closure of the main parking lot and trailhead will begin June 3rd through Sept. 1.

Clear Creek Canyon: Weekdays, starting May 14 through June 29, U.S. 6 between Golden and the junction of U.S. 6 and State Highway 119 intersection will be closed, except as noted below:

U.S. 6 (Clear Creek Canyon Park) will be open beginning 10 a.m. on Fridays through 11 p.m. on Sundays

Mount Evans Wilderness Area: It has experienced extreme winds this winter. Many roads and trails will be blocked until the forest service can get trail crews out later this summer. The Chicago Lakes hike is particularly impassable at the moment. Currently, it is being cleared.

In the mean time it is recommended that you contact the forest service before planning a trip:

For the northern half, call the South Platte office: 303-275-5610

For the southern half, call the Clear Creek office: 303-567-3000

RMNP: From May 29, through October 9, from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Bear Lake Road, approximately one mile west of Moraine Park Visitor Center to Bear Lake, will be accessible by free shuttle bus only, seven days a week. Private vehicles will be allowed both directions prior to 9:00 a.m. and after 4:00 p.m. Visitors in private vehicles, who make the 9:00 a.m. cutoff time, will be allowed to travel eastbound throughout the day.

HESSIE TRAIL HEAD – INDIAN PEAKS WILDERNESS: As part of a Boulder County effort to address traffic congestion and illegal parking, free shuttle bus service began the first weekend in June carrying passengers from Nederland High School to the U.S. Forest Service's Hessie Trailhead. The 15-passenger shuttle buses operate from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. on summer Saturdays, Sundays and holidays, including July 4 and Labor Day. People can park their cars at Nederland High School, where a shuttle will depart for the trailhead every 15 minutes. People using the shuttles can take leashed dogs with them.

Woods Creek: The Urad access road to the Woods Creek drainage will be closed until May 1, 2013.

** Comments or any information you'd like to share? Please contact Deb Robak – kaborbed@comcast.net **