



AAC Publications

Falling Rock - Pulled Rock Off, Failed to Inspect Top of Boulder Problem

Colorado, Boulder, Flagstaff Mountain

During the early afternoon on May 3, calls for help were reported near Realization Point on Flagstaff Mountain. Rocky Mountain Rescue Group (RMRG), AMR Ambulance, City of Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks, Boulder City Fire Department, and the Boulder County Sheriff's Office responded to the scene. Bystanders at the trailhead pointed in the general direction of the cries, and responders quickly located a stuck and injured climber, pinned underneath a large boulder, a short distance north of Flagstaff Road. Andrew Chapman (27) and his girlfriend had been bouldering with a companion on a 10- to 12-foot-tall boulder, and unexpectedly pulled off a large piece of rock (the size of a large boulder). The climber fell backward to the ground and came to rest in a sitting position, pinned against a tree, with one leg pinned between the detached piece of the boulder and another rock. He sustained injuries but was able to breathe normally. He could not extract himself. Upon arrival, rescuers quickly began formulating plans to move the boulder and free the injured climber. The multi-agency crew completed extrication at 2:47 p.m. RMRG then performed a short scree evacuation to carry Chapman to a waiting ambulance for transport to Boulder Community Hospital. He is expected to make a full recovery.

Analysis

Approximately one percent of climbing accidents RMRG responds to are caused by rockfall. Most of these accidents occur February through June. Seasonal risk increase is presumably associated with seasonal precipitation, freeze-thaw cycles, and climbing use patterns. The first climbers of the season are more likely to pull off loosened rock than the last climbers of the season. The injured climber remarked that if he had inspected the top of the boulder problem prior to attempting to climb it, he likely would have noticed the loose rock hazard and avoided it. This accident occurred in a relatively low climbing-use area. In more popular areas, other climbers are likely to have already released loose rock. Climbers are well advised to be particularly alert to potential rockfall hazards from February through June. Added caution is appropriate on less-traveled rock formations or routes. (Sources: Rockymountainrescue.org and Dailycamara.org.)

Images

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