



AAC Publications

Fall on Rock, Falling Rock

Colorado, Rocky Mountain National Park, Longs Peak

On August 16, Christian Mason (34) took a roped fall of about 50 feet and suffered numerous injuries after being hit by falling rock while simul-climbing in the North Chimney (5.5), below the Diamond face. Rockfall reportedly hit him while he was in the lead. Fortunately, he was roped and did not fall to the base of the east face of Longs Peak.

Mason reported: "One of the hardest things for me has been not knowing what caused the accident. A falling rock knocking me out seems like the most logical explanation, but I really have no idea. I had always thought of myself as a safe and reasonably conservative alpine climber. I remember swapping leads with my partner about two-thirds of the way up the North Chimney. I remember placing the Camalot (#1) that I fell on and continuing up around 20 feet to another ledge. The rock quality was pretty poor there, and after looking at the potential fall I started looking for someplace solid enough to place reliable gear. That's my last clear memory. I can remember bits and pieces of the next three days, but it's very disjointed.

"I ended up with two skull fractures, six broken ribs, a broken left scapula, a broken neck (fracture of C1-2), and broken back (T5 and T6). Amazingly, I don't appear to have any nerve damage. While I'll have a fairly long recovery, I should be able to recover more or less fully." After receiving the call for assistance, a park ranger/park medic climbed up the North Chimney and reached the climber at 11:30 a.m. while two additional rangers rappelled from Chasm View. Christian was evacuated with the help of Rocky Mountain National Park rangers and fellow climbers. (Source: Christian Mason.)

Analysis

The North Chimney is a ca. 450-foot, relatively low-angle approach to the vertical Diamond wall, with some loose rock (especially on the steepest section near the top) and low fifth-class climbing. Many climbers choose to solo the North Chimney approach. However, given the popularity of this route, climbers should take extra care to protect themselves from rockfall, especially if there are parties above. Christian's survival clearly demonstrates the value of roping up and placing protection in such an environment, even on technically easy terrain. (Source: Aram Attarian.)

Images

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