



AAC Publications

Rockfall – Crowded Cliff

Colorado, Eldorado Canyon, Redgarden Wall

My partner and I (age 23) decided to climb Rewritten (5.7) in Eldorado Canyon State Park on Saturday, December 7. We started later in the day, arriving at the park around 10 a.m., because the morning was cold. The park was relatively empty, but there were three other parties in the small area around Rewritten: one starting the first pitch of Rewritten, one preparing to climb West Chimney, and one beginning Swanson Arête, starting on the Red Ledge.

As I was aking the rope at the base of the Rewritten, a climber on Swanson Arête yelled “rock!” and I saw a basketball-size rock coming down. I ran toward the base of the climb and got in the fetal position, thinking the rock was moving outward. The rock hit a ledge and exploded, and a tennis ball-size fragment hit my right elbow. I took my shell off to find my arm covered in blood. I stepped away from the wall about ten meters and pulled out a small med kit I had in my backpack. As my partner was cleaning the blood off my cut, a golf ball-size rock landed about six inches from my big toe (I didn’t have my climbing shoes on yet). I panicked for about 30 seconds but was able to calm down and move further from the wall.

During this time, the party climbing Rewritten had continued up the route, with the leader almost at the first belay ledge. The belayer then noticed that some of their rope, still on the ground, had been severely damaged by the rockfall. Fortunately, that portion of the rope wasn’t in the belay system yet. The climber decided to downclimb the route. We headed back to the car.

ANALYSIS

Rockfall is an objective hazard at most cliffs, but some areas are more prone than others. The area around Rewritten is characterized by large belay ledges covered in loose rock. Falling rocks are liable to bounce off ledges and can land anywhere, including many meters into the nearby woods. The climber on Swanson did yell “rock” very audibly, which gave us some warning.

Rewritten is one of the most popular routes in one of the most popular climbing areas in greater Denver. I made an assumption that the route wouldn’t be as busy in December and after recent snow. It would have been better to arrive earlier or even decide on a different route after seeing how busy it was.

After a rockfall incident, it’s a good idea to re-flake and inspect your rope. The climber on Rewritten had almost reached the top of the first pitch before the belayer noticed the damaged section of rope. (Source: Anonymous injured climber.)

Images

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