



AAC Publications

Fatal Scrambling Fall — Picking Up Trash

Colorado, Boulder Canyon, Bihedral Area, The Riviera

On March 23 just past 3 p.m., my friend Marc and I (Sarah Zubrin) were heading down the trail from the Riviera area in Boulder Canyon after a day of climbing with a larger group comprised of four total adults—including Marc and me—and two younger children. On our hike out, Marc spotted a discarded aluminum can on the slabs above the trail. We scrambled up the pile of rocks together. As Marc began traversing a slab to retrieve the can, I said, “I’ll meet you up there—this area is kind of slick,” planning instead to go up and around the formation. A few moments later, I heard what I thought was a car door slamming; in retrospect, it was the sound of Marc striking the ground after an unroped fall. After I waited five minutes around the corner at the base of Zig Zag Crack, Marc did not appear, so I commented to another member of our group that he was past the expected time. I went to search for him. When I found him, I called his name. There was no response and I knew he was likely deceased.

Marc had fallen approximately 25 feet and struck a rock; he had no carotid pulse. I called for another group member to activate her Garmin inReach SOS, and then brought both children down to the base while the remaining two adults began chest compressions. Marc was pronounced deceased when SAR arrived, within approximately 20 minutes of the SOS activation. CPR was administered continuously from discovery until the arrival of EMS.

ANALYSIS

The discarded can was found on Marc’s person, confirming he had retrieved it and was returning back the way he’d come—across a slanting ledge about two feet wide that cuts across an area of debris, loose rocks, dirt, and bushes. A climber with 30 years’ experience, Marc was comfortable with low-angle scrambling, and my best read is that he was traversing the ledge facing outward when he fell. There were no signs of blood, skin, or clothing on the cliff itself. He did not tie his shoes—one shoe was missing, and both shoes were untied. Marc had dislodged a rock (located face down with fresh green grass underneath). It appears that his left foot slipped, and there was no opportunity to catch himself. In the fall, Marc flipped and landed chest down, shattering his rib cage and sustaining two skull fractures. A helmet might have saved his life.

Complacency was a factor here. The terrain was not technical, but the consequences of a slip were total. Untied shoes on loose, dirty rock, a ledge facing the wrong direction, a dislodged rock: None of these alone would have been fatal, but together they were. Spring conditions in Boulder Canyon bring loose rock, wet surfaces, and unstable debris that demand full attention on approaches and descents. for a similar accident on the adjacent Bihedral crag. (Source: Sarah Zubrin.)

Images

Article Details

Author	Sarah Zubrin
Publication	ANAM
Volume	14
Issue	1
Page	67
Copyright Date	2026
Article Type	Accident reports