



AAC Publications

Fatal Ground Fall — Rope Cut

Colorado, Eldorado Canyon State Park, West Ridge

On November 2, Greg Cameron (69) and Dean Brubaker were climbing on the West Ridge formation in Eldorado Canyon . They warmed up on Xanadu (5.10a), and then started up the classic Chockstone (3 pitches, 5.10a). Brubaker led the first pitch, and then Cameron started leading the second.

It is noted on Mountain Project that the second pitch is rated an improbable “9+s”—“...the s is for sandbag as quoted from the new Eldo book...”—and “might seem a bit harder than the first.” Cameron fell early on the pitch, but his gear held and he continued up. At 2:18 p.m., near the top, he traversed right across a sharp arête toward the two-bolt anchor, before the traverse—described on Mountain Project as “an awkward traversing/mantel/arête move”—placing solid protection in the form of small nuts. Then he fell again. This time, the rope was loaded as it crossed the arête and was completely sliced. Cameron fell to the ground, a fall that witnesses and rescuers estimated at 70 feet. He landed amid some broken pine branches with the severed rope still tied to him.

About 100 feet away, Karl Manteuffel was leading Xanadu when he heard a yell and then the impact; his partner saw Cameron falling. Manteuffel was lowered to the ground, and the pair ran to the scene. By the time they arrived, three other climbers had gotten there. Manteuffel’s party called 911 at 2:23 p.m. and began CPR on the unconscious Cameron. Half an hour later, Rocky Mountain Rescue arrived, and Cameron was taken to Boulder Community Hospital. He was sent to the Surgical Intensive Care Unit at Denver Health with a fractured femur, fractured pelvis, and brain bleeds. He died from complications three months later, on February 8.

ANALYSIS

Cut ropes are rare, but they do happen (see [ANAC 2025](#)). “The accident showed me that climbers, including myself, don’t often think about their rope getting cut, but under the right forces it can happen,” wrote Manteuffel on Mountain Project. In June 2010, a similar accident occurred in Eldorado Canyon when Joe Miller (38) fell on the second pitch of Yellow Spur (5.9). Several pieces pulled, and Miller’s rope crossed a sharp edge, severing and resulting in a fatal ground fall (see [ANAC 2011](#)).

The skillful use of runners can minimize rope damage when you’re climbing across sharp arêtes, protruding fins, or sharp-edged roofs. Experience plays a key role in doing this effectively. On certain routes, climbers will use double or twin ropes, and in even rarer circumstances, two single cords.

Sometimes, a climber can place a directional piece that guides the rope away from an edge. Be alert to one’s position around sharp features, and research guidebooks and online resources before getting on your selected climb. (Sources: Mountain Project, Rocky Mountain Rescue Group, and Climbing Magazine.)

Images

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