Preface

With more articles and accident reports than in prior years, the 2026 ANAC is 16 pages longer than recent editions. I apologize to those of you who submitted a report that you do not see here; please understand the we had to make difficult decisions despite the additional pages.

That said, here are some highlights: untangling the science of climbing knots; how to safely summit the highest point in the Lower 48; and how a climber started a Preventative Search and Rescue (PSAR) program that might serve as a model for other areas in the United States.

On a more somber note, we still have far too many lowering mishaps. These are among the deadliest but also most preventable types of climbing accidents. Lowering from a two-bolt belay on a sport route is usually the first self-managed hurdle in a beginning climber's outdoor career—and if something goes wrong at the anchor, the climber is falling from the highest possible point on the route.

Top-rope solo (TRS) accidents are a growing trend. People are busy; trying to pack climbing into a full life and difficult to account for a climbing partner's schedule. Some turn to TRS. It's true that you don't need a partner, but with the exception of one piece of gear, the tools are not purpose-built. A host of unseen hazards pose very serious consequences. TRS has no formal curriculum nor best-practice standards for any of its myriad iterations; it is a DIY game, and those who seek its seductive independence are taking their lives in their own hands.

This year we crossed a threshold in that almost uniquely American accident form—the stuck-knee-in-an-offwidth. When first reported, they were viewed as curiosities, amusing but hardly worthy of the "accident" label. Fast-forward to 2026, and we find two different climbers stuck in two different offwidths, 800 miles apart—one on Bugaboo alpine rock and the other outside Salt Lake City. Both entrapments were potentially fatal. I worry that these won't be the last. The bright note is: both were aided by other climbers and have recovered fully.

Three accidents reported had a fixed piton pull out of the rock. I hope this won't become a trend. Most fixed pins are far past their expiration dates; unless the pins fall out overnight, education and replacement with reliable fixed protection are the only remedies.

Finally, Dr. Karr introduces a new framework called ANCHORs in our Human Factors section. This is one more step towards understanding the why behind climbing mishaps. If one pushes aside an accident's technical cause, the single common element is the climber's behavior before, during, and after an accident. These factors cross all styles and all skill levels. Understanding our behavior can become a shared currency—a common lexicon binding climbers together in a world in which status, performance, and tribal affiliations can pull us apart. In the wake of an accident, we tend to dissect, discuss, argue, and blame, but understanding Human Factors is to understand our shared fallibility and empowers us to be more vigilant against catastrophe.

Images

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