



The Redguard Simul-Climbing Epic: 100-foot rope, 140-foot fall

Kevin Vranes

It was a stretch, but they had been training hard. Bill Wright was convinced that he could climb 100 pitches in a single day in Eldorado Canyon State Park, known locally as “Eldo.” A ‘pitch’ is a single segment of a vertical rock climb, typically about 150 feet long. To accomplish 100 pitches, they would have to link together many different climbing routes within the park.

Wright is a well-known Eldo climber with decades of serious climbing under his belt, and he had no problem finding a partner for his push. To save time they would simul-climb, a technique in which two climbers are tied directly to each other and both climb simultaneously, the leader a rope’s length above the second with little to no slack in between.

After months of training, Bill and his partner set out at 4:00 AM on June 26, 2010 for their push.

A third of the way through the 100-pitch day, disaster struck the climbing team. As Bill later wrote in his blog, “It is a very rare, very long, very serious fall indeed when a leader, ninety feet above, falls below the second climber. And Tom fell far below me. When I saw him, I still had at least two or more seconds before the rope snapped tight against my harness.” Tom sustained serious injuries and both climbers were now stranded several hundred feet above the ground.

Dr. Alison Sheets, RMR’s medical director and an ER physician, was finishing an overnight shift at Longmont United Hospital.

She was looking forward to a long day of sleep. Instead, her RMR pager started buzzing at 07:28 for an unconscious fallen climber. “I actually went to the canyon in my scrubs, then realized the extent of the call and went home [a two minute drive from the accident scene] to change and grab gear,” she related afterward.

After arriving at the command post, through high-powered binoculars Dr. Sheets could see the patient moving his arms and legs, so she figured she probably wasn’t needed. But Clint Dillard, a senior RMR member and himself an ER Physician Assistant and former Paramedic, was with the patient. When Dillard heard over the radio that Dr. Sheets was in the area, his response was, “Send her up!” The patient was alive and semi-conscious, but had a serious head injury. While Dillard provided advanced life support mid-wall, he knew it would be very helpful to have a second advanced provider on scene.

A mid-wall loading of an injured patient in vertical terrain is one of the most complicated procedures that RMR performs and this mission was further complicated by its length. It would take the full length of dual 600-foot ropes to bring the patient from his location to the ground.

Before the litter can even go over the edge at the top of the cliff, an anchor and belay station must be established above. In vertical terrain, easy anchors are rarely available. That day, it fell on Les Sikos to establish one. “It seemed pretty clear

(continued on page 2)

photo: Lisa Sparhawk



Recent Rescue Story (continued from page 1)

right away that this was going to be a big mission, possibly with two patients. I raced up to the top with a first aid kit and climbing gear, thinking I could solve the anchor situation and possibly rappel to the upper patient with medical gear.”

Finding the right line down to the patient can be impossible from above, so Sikos worked with a spotter across the canyon to get the best alignment. “We ended up needing to get a direction change anchor well out on a buttress before lowering in to the patients.” Establishing anchors above, even five feet in the wrong direction, can mean missing the patient by forty feet at the loading point, costing valuable time. “The line was perfect. I came in just above Bill, the uninjured climber, grabbed him, and then continued down.”

At 09:38, Andrew Blackstock, the RMR member carrying the evacuation litter and full-body vacuum splint, was lowered to the injured climber on a second 600-foot rope. The first 600-foot rope, which had been used to lower Sikos and the uninjured climber to the base, was now raised 200 feet and used as the second rope in a dual-rope system, standard for RMR’s vertical-terrain evacuations.

While the litter and ropes were readied for patient loading, Dillard and Dr. Sheets remained with the patient and provided medical care. Still 200 feet off the ground, IV fluids, oxygen and spinal precautions were initiated and continued through a tricky mid-wall litter loading and eventual arrival at a helicopter. Airway equipment and medications were available in case of patient deterioration.

The total time of the vertical evacuation, once underway, was four minutes. Once off the vertical wall, RMR and Alpine Rescue Team (based in Evergreen, CO and called in on mutual aid) used a standard “scree” evacuation technique to bring the patient to the canyon floor. The patient was in the ambulance at 10:25 and on his way to a helicopter landing zone two miles away, for a flight to St. Anthony’s Hospital, a Level 1 trauma center in Denver.

In addition to 25 RMR members who responded, seven rescuers from Alpine Rescue Team, personnel from Rocky Mountain Fire Authority, American Medical Response, Louisville Fire, Boulder County Sheriff’s Office, Colorado State Parks, and Air Life assisted in this rescue.

For more information on this mission, including a link to Bill Wright’s blog, check out our Redguard Route Rescue page: http://www.rockymountainrescue.org/eldo_Redguard_6-26-2010.php

Mission Statistics

Kevin Vranes

2009 was one of the busiest years in RMRG history.

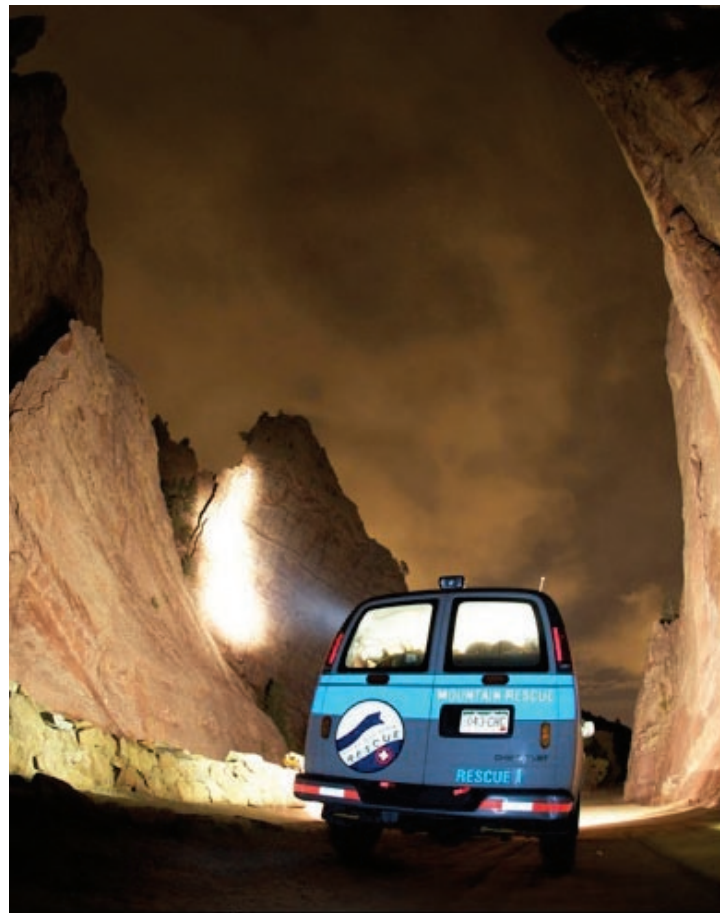
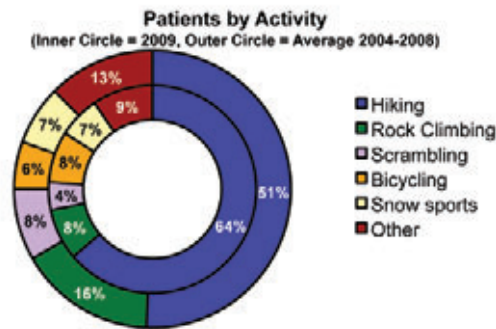
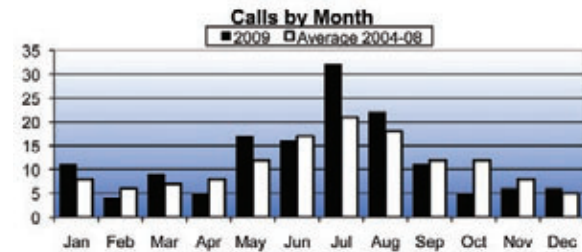


photo: Daniel Lack

Beacons for Outdoor Safety

Kevin Vranes and Katie Johnson

Technological advances have led to a recent increase in the number and type of “beacons” designed to enhance outdoor safety. These handheld devices are roughly divided into two categories: those that communicate with satellites and can alert authorities at great distances in case of emergency, and those that communicate only with other local devices. Common satellite-communication devices include Personal Locator Beacons (PLBs) and the SPOT. These devices can signal an emergency to a satellite and thus initiate a rescue. The local-device category includes avalanche beacons, which can help locate a buried person in case of avalanche, and the TracMe. These devices are only useful if rescuers are nearby and know an accident has occurred.



photo: Rob O'Dea

PLBs: Upon activation of their emergency modes, PLBs send a signal to the government-run COSPAS-SARSAT satellite network on the 406 MHz frequency. This triggers a call to a Rescue Coordination Center (RCC), which notifies the appropriate local authorities. Modern PLBs also transmit a homing signal on 121.5 MHz, and some are equipped with a GPS to send a position to the RCC. The homing signal is used by field teams equipped with radio direction-finding (DF) technology to more

easily find the beacon. RMRG maintains equipment and a high level of competency for DF missions, but not every mountain rescue team is so fortunate. The SPOT system is a type of PLB, but with a privately-operated RCC; they come with a built-in GPS but no homing signal.

Local beacons: Avalanche beacons, or transceivers, are local-only, short-range devices and transmit a low-power signal at a frequency of 457 kHz. In contrast to PLBs, which should only be activated in case of emergency, avalanche transceivers should be turned on to “transmit” mode when entering terrain in which an avalanche may occur. If a person is caught in an avalanche, his or her partners can turn their own transceivers to “receive” mode to search for the missing person. Transceiver range is variable, but is usually in the 10-40 meter range. TracMe beacons work a bit differently: they are kept off until an emergency occurs, then turned on. They only help a party in distress, however, if rescuers know of the emergency (rescuers are not automatically notified of distress signals from a TracMe) and have DF equipment.

Confusion over the use of the word “beacon” recently led to a three-month, multi-agency search for an unregistered PLB that was being used incorrectly. The beacon was first activated on December 14, 2009 in the Berthoud Pass area in Clear Creek County. The beacon was deactivated before rescuers could find the device or its owner. In the next two months, the beacon was sporadically activated in various locations, usually near backcountry ski areas.

On February 11, 2010, the beacon was again activated on Berthoud Pass, but this time was not turned off. The beacon was then tracked along the I-70 corridor, indicating it was in a moving vehicle. RMRG members used radio DF techniques to track the PLB to the owner’s car in downtown Boulder. The owner had been activating his PLB while skiing potential avalanche terrain, confusing his PLB with an avalanche beacon, and thinking that if an avalanche did occur, somebody would be automatically notified.

Take the time to expertly learn how to use any device you purchase. These devices should not be viewed as a license to make poor decisions. They may assist rescuers in reaching you, but like all electronic devices they may also fail at a critical point, and they do not replace common sense.

For more information PLBs and related devices, see http://www.rockymountainrescue.org/about_PLBs.php. Also, RMRG hosts annual training sessions for avalanche transceivers in early winter; please check <http://www.rockymountainrescue.org/osavalanche.php> for 2010 dates.

Thank you to our 2010 supporters!



photo: Daniel Lack

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Rocky Mountain Rescue Group, Inc.
P.O. Box Y
Boulder, CO 80306

Member Profile: Skip Green (1934-2010)

Dixon Hutchinson

On Sunday, January 10, 2010, Skip Greene, a great friend and long time member of RMRG, passed away.

Skip learned of his terminal illness (Leukemia) in early December, 2009. Like every problem he encountered in life, he explored his options and then adapted himself to meet the problem using the resources at his disposal. Skip kept to his values of simplicity and practicality. He spent less than a week in the hospital and died at the home of one of his sons under the care of friends and family.

Skip's name first appeared on the RMRG call list in 1953. He was an active rock climber in his youth, participating in the first ascent of the North Face of the Matron, and once sharing his climbing experience with his Labrador retriever on a trip up the 3rd Flatiron. Skip pulled off the first solo winter ascent of the East Face of Longs Peak in 1953. In the '60s, Skip became the manager of CU's Mountain Research Station north of Nederland and helped teach research students of the Institute for Arctic and Alpine Research [INSTAAR] about operating on Niwot Ridge in all seasons. Skip helped implement the various research platforms that dot Niwot Ridge.

Skip recently recalled his early years with RMR as mostly riding around with Dex Brinker in his jeep. The Group was less structured in those days, but Skip became an official member of the Group in the late '60s. At the Mountain Research Station, Skip developed a wide array of techniques for transporting people and equipment over-snow in the backcountry. For RMRG, this led to his development of what Skip called "Snowmobile Mountaineering" skills, the "Skip-Sled" litter carrier, and the special modification of small lightweight snowmobiles for remote backcountry operations.

Skip's last mission with the Group was August 12th, 2009, for an elderly male with a leg injury at the west end of Long Lake who was eventually evacuated to a medical helicopter. Skip put himself "in-service" for the winter season with his array of snowmobiles and the "Skip-Sled" litter in September.

Skip built his own house at the base of Niwot Ridge. He lived "off-grid," raising his own sons and helping to raise the sons of his second wife. In later years, Skip was a bus driver for the Boulder Valley School District, operating large school buses on the District's most difficult mountain roads. He woke up at 4:00 am to spend at least 45 minutes "pre-flighting" his bus

every morning, rain or snow, crawling underneath the bus, examining every component from the front to the back. Skip was to retire at the end of this school year. His devotion to the kids he drove is reflected in the cards and artwork that decorate his house.

Skip was always a promoter of an ultra-conservative approach to safety. Skip stressed to always know your limits, then perform well within them so that you would always have something held in reserve. In case something should go wrong, you could dig into those reserves to finish the job.

RMRG will deeply miss Skip.

Skip's son, Vincent Greene's "Ten treasured things I learned from my Dad by example:"

- Slow down -- a lot of important observations are missed if we are going to fast
- Appreciate simplicity
- Be a student for life: Listen, Observe, Think, Learn
- Practice organization
- Do it yourself - participation is good - be inventive
- Hard work is fun
- Dare to be different, shun peer pressure
- Appreciate quality
- Be open to all types of people
- Have your life speak your convictions



photo: Jenny Paddock

Upcoming Events

In addition to our regularly-scheduled Wednesday meetings and Sunday practices, which are open to the public, our annual winter activities include:

Mountain Rescue Ale

Join us for our ever-popular annual Mountain Rescue Ale at the Walnut Brewery. It starts off with the beer-tapping event November 11th from 6pm to close and runs through the month of November or until this unique hand-crafted beer runs out! A portion of the proceeds from the Mountain Rescue Ale will benefit RMRG.



photo: courtesy Walnut Brewery

Walnut Brewery
1123 Walnut St
Boulder

Holiday Gift Wrapping

Stop by Neptune Mountaineering in Boulder December 18th and 19th to get all your gifts wrapped by "expert" wrappers! See our website for specific times.

Joe Despres Memorial Avalanche Transceiver Training

Stay safe this winter by refreshing your avalanche beacon skills at



photo: Rob O'Dea

RMRG's annual Joe Despres Memorial trainings. Bring your family, friends, and ski/showshoe partners. Training is free. Bring your own beacon or borrow one of ours. Dress warmly, bring a light and a transceiver if you have one. Transceivers are available free for loan with deposit of a driver's license. Contact Dave Christenson AT RockyMountainRescue.org or (303)665-3642 to RSVP.

7 pm · Dec 3 & 4 · Chautauqua Ranger Cottage · Boulder

See our website at www.RockyMountainRescue.org for all the up-to-date details on these and other events.

Test Tower

Tim Gray

RMRG's test tower program has been busy this year with various research and development projects. With the support of a grant from the Mountain Rescue Association, RMRG was able to purchase three life-size mannequins (weighing 165 pounds each) with life-like range of motion. These mannequins are being used to research the behavior of several different vertical rescue systems when they are subjected to a mainline failure. The goal is to determine the best vertical system for RMRG's use, as well as provide information to other teams regarding their rescue systems.

The initial testing RMRG performed was to determine just how life-like the mannequins were. Using commercial grade software and hardware, RMRG determined how the mannequins behaved when subjected to a short freefall "caught" by either a rope or steel cable. This data was compared to the results for actual humans, as well as steel plates. These experiments determined that the mannequins behaved quite similarly to real humans (as opposed to the steel plates, which had very different characteristics compared to real humans).

The initial research was compiled into a paper authored by RMRG members Tim Holden, Bill May, and Rich Farnham. The paper, titled "On the Utility of Rescue Randy Mannequins in Rescue Systems Drop Testing" was submitted to the International Tech Rescue Symposium (ITRS) for publication. In addition, Rich presented key results from the research at the 2009 ITRS in Pueblo, CO, where RMRG earned the Best New Research Presentation award for their efforts.



photo: Bill May

Dexter Brinker and the Rocky Mountain Rescue Group Three decades of mountain rescue

Clint Dillard

Rescue requires teamwork, a lot of teamwork; while the Rocky Mountain Rescue Group has a rich history of individual, selfless dedication to caring for the lost and injured in the mountains, no rescuer would lay individual claim to that moniker. Sometimes, though, it is individual contributions that make all the difference. Without Dexter ("Dex") Brinker, RMRG group leader in 1949 and 1951, Colorado mountain rescue would not be what it is today.

Dex returned home after fighting overseas in WWII to join up with a few other local mountain enthusiasts who were just getting RMRG off the ground. In May of 1948, a Civil Aeronautics Administration C-47 plane, missing since January, was found by Dex, Bruce Snow and a reporter from the Rocky Mountain News. This first mission sealed Dex's path toward future rescue work.

The group learned what they could from old Army manuals and practiced at a belay tower they set up. Alice and Roy Holubar of Holubar Mountaineering [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holubar_Mountaineering] were instrumental in getting the group its gear. Alice made packs, and she and Roy obtained surplus Army stokes litters.

After a rocky start and years of being discredited by the townspeople, the group's reputation slowly began to solidify. On October 6th, 1955, United Airlines flight 409, a DC-4 with 66 people on-board, went missing over the Medicine Bow wilderness in Wyoming. Located by search planes, flight 409 had no survivors. Dex and Don Ackerman, another RMRG pioneer, drove to Laramie and met with the president of United Airlines. After a short discussion, RMR was officially requested to assist with the recovery, and a team was organized. The work was technically challenging and the mission was highly publicized. The publicity proved to be a turning point for the group, as the community came to view RMRG as a highly skilled mountain rescue team.

Early on, members provided transportation with personal vehicles, like Dex's 1942 Jeep, but in the early 1950's the group purchased its first truck. A used, underpowered, Army 6x6 cargo carrier called the "Yellow Monster" went into service. Dex recalled the group's first emergent response on a call near Nederland. "We got the truck out heading up the canyon, red lights and siren, 10-100. Charging up Boulder creek at 15 mph and the traffic passing us by." They quickly realized the lights and siren were useless.

In 1960 the Group was concerned by the increasing mission counts, and civil defense was becoming a hot topic, so Dex, planning ahead, sent invitation letters to agencies throughout the country requesting attendance at the RMRG-hosted "Rescue and Disaster Control Conference." Close to two hundred people met to discuss mutual aid response in the case of a large incident. Many long-standing relationships and organizations developed from this meeting, including the venerated partnership between RMRG and Alpine Rescue Team (Evergreen, CO). The Colorado Search and Rescue Board was also ultimately born out of this meeting [<http://www.coloradosarboard.org/csr-history.asp>].



photo: Troy Duckles

As we look back, we can see that

Dexter Brinker worked hard to make RMRG and the rescue community what it is today. Bruce Snow wrote this about Dex: "I would like to make special mention of one individual who I believe to be responsible for the continued life, growth, and ultimate health of Rocky Mountain Rescue. It is due largely to him, I believe, that the Group was held together in the years '49, '50, and '51 particularly. Write his name large in the history of the organization. If I were still a member, I would nominate Dexter Brinker for a life membership."

Dex and his wife Mary live outside Durango, CO in their home that they built themselves. Dex is still driving his workhorse of a jeep around, which he treats like a member of the family.

A video interview with Dex is available on our website.

We Never Charge for Rescue

RMRG does not charge for search and rescue under any circumstances. Our position is guided by the experience that concerns regarding billing delay and complicate rescue operations. We are members of the Colorado Search and Rescue Board and the Mountain Rescue Association, both of which also oppose billing for mountain search and rescue services. Other agencies may also be involved in patient services and RMRG cannot control billing practices of these other agencies. For more information please see <http://www.rockymountainrescue.org/Charging4Rescue.php>.

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Recent quotes

"During my descent on a litter to the landing zone, I was impressed with the seamless cooperation among the teams, and the professionalism and expertise displayed by everyone involved. I am sincerely grateful for the effort put forth by your personnel who took part in the operation."

"Everyone on that rescue conducted themselves with the utmost professionalism on difficult terrain and potentially dangerous conditions. I hope I will never have to use your services again but if I do it is nice to know you are out there. I'm fully recovered and back out climbing again. It's nice to know RMR is there just in case. Your performance that night was brilliant and I will be forever grateful."

- Matt Kelley, victim of 2009/013

"I owe the fact that I will walk again to your prompt and well planned actions, I am forever in your debt."

- Kevin Rose, victim

"You provide a valuable service to our community. I read about your rescues all of the time in the paper. You had a particularly busy weekend. Thank you for your service."



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