



Mountaineering is an enjoyable and challenging sport offering something for everyone, from easy walk-ups to multiday, technical climbs. There are mountains for every level of ability. Please realize that no one will be around to help you if you get into trouble. Follow the common sense rules listed below:

- * Mountain climbing in the Elk Range of the Aspen District should only be attempted by experienced climbers. The routes on even the easiest mountains are usually very steep and hand and footholds are very loose. Often there is snow on the route and skill with an ice ax is a necessity. On some of the steepest mountains all the holds are loose and a rope and hard hat may be recommended and should be used.

- * The weather can change very quickly so be prepared for the worst. It can snow anytime in the higher mountains. Start early and be sure of your route. One mistake in routefinding or a late start could mean spending the night on the mountain. Carry proper clothing for all conditions. Food, water, matches, map and compass, first aid kit, sunglasses and sunburn cream are necessities.

- * If you haven't climbed before we recommend starting in the Elk Mountains with a guide or someone who has been there before. Nearly every year there are unnecessary deaths that are the result of inexperienced climbers. Even expert climbers have been known to get into trouble and have been killed. (You can get a list of U.S. Forest Service permitted Outfitter Guides at the District Office front desk).

- * In the Elk Range we have six peaks over 14,000 feet and numerous summits over 13,000 feet. Many of these are hard to get to. The following climbs will give you a wide variety and are relatively accessible:

- * **Maroon Bells and Snowmass Wilderness** area provides many challenges to the climber and hiker but these mountains, particularly the **Maroon Bells**, have a grim record of needless fatal accidents, so be careful and climb safely.

The following pointers have been gathered from others...often after it was too late. Read them and keep them in mind for your own good and for your loved ones. Hikers who depart from the established trails should heed those pointers which are appropriate, particularly where dealing with rock conditions, moisture and grades. Proper footwear is essential even if only minimum climbing is undertaken. It is well to remember that most of the accidents on these mountain have occurred during descent. The casual hiker should think of this when the Colorado sunshine and magnificent views tempt him to heights greater than originally contemplated.

- * **WAIT!** Have you registered your climb? You should register with a responsible friend who will watch for your return.

- * **ARE YOU IN SHAPE?** Acclimated? To reach the 14,156 foot summit of North Maroon Peak you must climb over 4,600 vertical feet from where you park your car. Fatigue causes bad judgement and carelessness, both of which have killed on these mountains. It is recommended that you be at altitude for 24 hours before venturing into any strenuous hiking and/or climbing.

- * **TIME?** Plan your trip so that you have plenty of time. No less than one full day should be allowed for ascent and return to camp. Under normal conditions summits should be reached no later than noon. A high camp and an early start save time and strength. Reconnoiter the morning's approach the evening



before and be on your way at first light. Remember to set your limit and turn back when any member of the party cannot safely continue. The mountain will be there tomorrow!

* **DECEPTIVE AND DEADLY!** The gradient, snow and rock conditions on the Maroon Bells make them very dangerous to climb. The rock is loose, shattered, and downsloping. Footholds as large as two feet in width have been known to give way under a climber. Piton cracks are frequently unreliable, and adequate belay stances are often hard to come by. Don't be taken in by that 3rd class gradient - it is a long way down with nothing in between. Belay where you are safe from dislodged rock and keep the leads short and reasonable. Be aware of temperature changes. Increasing temperature may be all that is needed to release rocks that appear well anchored. Gullies are especially subject to rolling rocks when it warms up. The dry snow of this region consolidates poorly into hardpack and that solid surface may cover sugar snow or last winter's windslab.

* **CLIMBING EQUIPMENT!** Adequate mountain boots, nothing less; ice axes and crampons for snow and ice, hardware for protection (chrome-moly pitons may lever out the block you're nailing, so have some soft iron along), and the right clothing should be included with your equipment. Above all, have and wear a hard hat - lives have been saved by hard hats with chin straps attached.

* **WHAT ABOUT BIVOUAC GEAR?** Without it a long night at high altitudes will weaken you and open the door for an accident. An experienced climber is ready for anything. As a minimum the following bivouac gear is recommended:

- * Bivouac sack
- * Warm clothing and extra socks.
- * Goggles or parka.
- * Plenty of food.

If you are not prepared to bivouac, establish a turn around time that gets you off the mountain, delays included, before dark. If you must bivouac, set up before nightfall. Take ample time and care to anchor yourself and your gear well so that you will get as much rest as possible.

* **WHICH ROUTE ARE YOU TAKING?** Select a route in advance and learn as much about it as you can. Check with others who have climbed that route. Add their information to that from a guide book, then make a schematic drawing with pertinent information that can be pulled out for quick reference while climbing. Have a good map of the area and a compass - you have a lot of ground to cover in uncertain mountain weather.

This handout is not intended as a handbook or substitute for knowledge and skill. It is merely the product of several climbing fatalities on the Maroon Bells. Most of those persons killed were experienced climbers. Enjoy the freedom of the mountains, but respect them, they show no favors.

IN CASE OF EMERGENCY CALL - PITKIN COUNTY SHERIFF - 920-5300