

LIGHTNING DATA CENTER MINUTES

Denver, CO

December 12, 2025

Monthly Quote: “We were there and we were huddled together looking at each other and kinda laughing about what was going on because the weather was nice 5 minutes before. And it was like a millisecond and we were on the ground screaming.” - Brianna Pendley, July 4, 2025.

Members present: Clark, Yarnell, Gredig, Crow and Beckmann. We had two guests, Woody Woodward and Hugh Zuker. Meeting #1 began at 11:45 AM and ended at 12:25 PM. Meeting #2 began at 12:30 PM and ended at 1:10 PM.

1. The LDC is accepting donations, either as cash or check. If you donate via check, please make your check payable to Steve Clark at 755 S. Clinton Street, #2A; Denver, CO 80247. He will cash the check and keep the cash holdings specifically for the LDC. When the LDC incurs expenses, Steve will pay for services rendered through his bank account using the cash from LDC’s cash holdings. A log is maintained detailing the inflow and outflow of monies. The LDC currently has \$1047.00 in cash.
2. An 8-year old boy was electrically shocked and almost died. He was sleeping in his bed with a phone that was not fully plugged in to the charger. He was wearing a necklace that fell between the gap between the charger cord and an extension cord that the charger cord was connected to. He tried to scream for help but he could not due to the shock. He was able to remove his necklace and get help. He was taken to the hospital where he had a skin graft done and remained under their care for two weeks. As of November 27, he was in a lot of pain after the skin graft.
3. Brianna Pendley, a photographer, her son, his friend and a future wedding bride were struck by lightning while standing under a tree at Roan Mountain in North Carolina. They were doing a wedding shoot for the bride when a sudden storm with hail came up. They took shelter under a tree and that was when the lightning hit. Pendley thinks the lightning hit a nearby tree, went down the roots and into the ground, and knocked them down. The weather was checked beforehand and skies were clear at the start of their hike, so the storm was unexpected. The photographer and the son were taken to a hospital, where the son and a friend of his had welts on their legs, but were otherwise not seriously hurt. The storm was over in five minutes.
4. LDC member Bruce Beckmann of Alpine Rescue Team was joined by Hugh Zuker and Woody Woodward. Hugh and Woody presented updates on two lightning search and rescue missions from this past summer: a nighttime helicopter rescue from Torrey’s Peak in June and two elk hunters who were struck and killed by lightning in September.

Rescue from Torrey’s Peak

Woody Woodward is a Mission Coordinator with Alpine Rescue Team who has responded to roughly 1450 backcountry incidents. He discussed the rescue of two hikers from Torrey’s Peak.

Two hikers from New York climbed their first Colorado 14er, Torrey's Peak, in June 2025. They were approaching the summit and got disoriented when bad weather moved in. They called for help to finish the ascent. After reaching what they thought was the summit, it was determined they were about 40 vertical feet below the summit.

Woody was talking to one of the hikers when he heard a scream and a yell. It was determined that the guy Woody was talking to had been hit by lightning, was unresponsive and foaming at the mouth. What was a simple verbal navigation changed into a hands-on rescue mission. By 7 PM, 37 rescuers had responded. Aviation support was requested, but was initially delayed due to poor weather.

A National Guard helicopter from the High-Altitude ARNG Aviation Training Site in Gypsum, Colorado was able to land on the summit at around 10:00pm and off-load two rescue technicians. When the helicopter arrived, the guy who had been unresponsive had regained consciousness and was combative and had to be calmed down before being hoisted up into the chopper. He was taken to Loveland Ski area, where an ambulance took him to the hospital in Denver. The second man was later airlifted to Loveland Ski area along with 4 rescuers and one of the Rescue Techs.

The total helicopter time was approximately two hours. The first man was later taken to a burn center and then hospitalized for 3 weeks. Army helicopters are stationed in Aurora and Gypsum, Colorado. These helicopters are not on standby like those for Flight for Life, so when a request comes in, it may take awhile to arrive due to pre-flight preparations that need to be done.

Please find attached an account to this rescue titled "Lightning Strike on Torrey's Peak – CSAR Member Portal.pdf", which was provided to us by Woody. NOTE: The document icon is skinny. It will open as a PDF file, but it takes a little while. Please be patient.

Two Elk Hunters

Hugh is the Chief Coordinator with Colorado Search & Rescue (CSAR). In Colorado, by state law, the county sheriff's office initiates search and rescue missions with whatever resources the county has available. If the county resources are not sufficient, the sheriff's office can contact CSAR and they will coordinate the location and usage of resources needed to complete the mission.

On September 6, 2025, two men arrived in Conejos County in southern Colorado to go elk hunting. On September 11 at 3:30 PM, the hunters had their daily communication with their families, as previously arranged. This was their last communication. On September 12, the county sheriff's office was notified the two hunters had not checked in with their families. They were last seen alive on September 12 by other hunters. Their vehicle was found on September 13, with bags, tents and backpacks inside.

A search and rescue mission was started on the 13th, but was delayed due to lightning in the area. Searchers were on foot, on horseback, using drones and helicopters and using dogs. From September 13-17, the hunters could not be found. On the 18th, some high school kids with Arapahoe Rescue Patrol, Inc., who were part of the 145 person search operation organized and run by CSAR, found the bodies under a tree. Hugh presented photos from near where they were found and showed us how hard it was to see the bodies, even from a relatively close position.

Autopsies were performed on September 22. Two photos stood out from the autopsy. The first photo showed Lichtenberg Figures (LFs) on one of the individuals approximately 9 days after the last reported lightning in the area. The literature says LFs usually fade in 24-48 hours, e.g., see (Cherington, 2005) and (Resnick & Wetli, 1996). Dr. Phil Yarnell said they can persist for much longer. The second photo showed a man's head and face was bloody, with blood in the area of his ear. Dr. Yarnell asked if the autopsy determined if the eardrum had been ruptured. Hugh did not know if the eardrum had been inspected but he did say there was not any bleeding from the ear canal.

5. Bruce Beckmann told us his video titled "Lightning Awareness" which is part of his "Skills for the Hills" series, is now being used as training material by five police agencies and four guiding services. The video can be seen at this link: <https://vimeo.com/419117465?fl=pl&fe=ti>
6. DC welcomes your questions. Please send them via e-mail to Steve Clark at sclarktoto@gmail.com. Your medical questions will be forwarded to Dr. Phil Yarnell for his review and will usually be taken up for discussion in the next month's meeting. Please be advised any questions posed are for the general consideration by the group and any answers given do not constitute a formal medical opinion. If a formal evaluation is requested, arrangements can be made directly with Dr. Yarnell. If you have a medical emergency, please call 911 or your local EMS.
7. Questions, comments, error notifications, and critiques of these minutes are welcome. Please send them to Steve Clark. Please keep the communications professional and respectful. They will be forwarded to the appropriate author(s) of the minutes and addressed accordingly.
8. LDC Disclaimer: These minutes do not represent official positions of the LDC or its members. They simply reflect the comments made at the meeting. Furthermore, the LDC does not implicitly or explicitly recommend or endorse any product or service. Any product or service presented in these minutes is done so for purposes of discussion and analysis. The merit (or lack thereof) is open for the consideration and review by the entire membership.
9. Next meeting: Friday, January 9, 2026, from 11:45 AM to TBA.

Respectfully Submitted,
Steven E. Clark
President, Lightning Data Center, Denver, CO

Lightning Links

This is a monthly listing of periodicals, websites, and videos about lightning and allied areas from a variety of sources. A headline or description is listed, followed by the link. Please note that some of the links are perishable, which means you'll need to go to the source for the information.

Flam, C., 2025: 8-Year-Old Electrocuted by Phone Charger in His Bed: 'I Almost Thought I Was About to Die'. *People Magazine* via *AOL News*. December 1, 2025.

Link: <https://people.com/8-year-old-electrocuted-by-phone-charger-in-his-bed-11860052>

11 ABC, 2025: Photographer, Son Survive Lightning Strike During Photoshoot on Roan Mountain. *WTVD-TV*. July 4, 2025.

Link: <https://abc11.com/post/photographer-son-survive-lightning-strike-during-bridal-photoshoot-mountains-western-north-carolina/16950402/>

Cherington, M., 2005: Spectrum of Complications of Lightning Injuries. *NeuroRehabilitation* 20 (2005) 3-8. IOS Press. Page 5.

Resnick, B. and C. Wetli, 1996: Lichtenberg Figures. *The American Journal of Forensic Medicine and Pathology* 17(2): 99-102, 1996. Lippencott-Raven Publishers. Pages 100 and 101.

Torrey's Peak Rescue

CBS Colorado, 2025: Alpine Rescue Team Recounts Emergency Rescue of Hiker Struck by Lightning. *KCNC-TV*. June 15, 2025. Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KvNEDy0_zWI

9News, 2025: Hikers Survive High-Altitude Lightning Strike on Torrey's Peak. *KUSA-TV*. June 17, 2025. Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V3TjjkLBtP4>

Cahalan, R., 2025: "The Phone Dropped, and Then Screaming." What It Was Like Saving Two Hikers, One Struck by Lightning, in a Record-Setting Rescue. *5280 Magazine*. June 30, 2025.

Link: <https://5280.com/torreys-peak-lightning-strike-rescue-interview/>

Jones, C., 2025: Hikers Struck by Lightning on Torreys Peak Saved by Alpine Rescue Group. *Summit Daily*. June 15, 2025.

Link: <https://www.summitdaily.com/news/alpine-rescue-team-helps-extract-two-individuals-after-lightning-strike-on-torreys-peak/>

Alpine Rescue Team, 2025: Lightning Strike on Torrey's Peak (webpage). June 18, 2025.

Link: <https://alpinerescueteam.org/lightning-strike-on-torreys-peak/>

Conejos County Lightning Fatalities

Ross, T. and O. Prentzel, 2025: Elk Hunters Found Dead in Southern Colorado Were Killed by Lightning, Coroner Says. *The Colorado Sun*. September 22, 2025.

Link: <https://coloradosun.com/2025/09/22/hunters-found-dead-victims-of-lightning-strike/>

Heaney, B., M. Verlee and S. Battulga, 2025: Experienced Hunters Found Dead In Conejos County Last Week Were Struck by Lightning, Authorities Say. *KRCC - Colorado Public Radio*. September 18 and 22, 2025. Link: <https://www.cpr.org/2025/09/18/conejos-county-missing-hunters-bodies-found/>

Hasman, G., 2025: Coroner: Missing Hunters Were Killed After Being Struck by Lightning. *Albuquerque Journal*. September 22, 2025.

Link: <https://www.abqjournal.com/news/coroner-missing-hunters-were-killed-after-being-struck-by-lightning/555258>

Search and Rescue Organizations in Colorado

Alpine Rescue Team. Link: <https://alpinerescueteam.org/>

Colorado Search & Rescue Association. Link: <https://coloradosar.org/>

Arapahoe Rescue Patrol, Inc. Link: <https://www.arapahoerescue.org/>

High-Altitude ARNG Aviation Training Site. Link: <https://co.ng.mil/Army/Schoolhouse-HAATS/>