



AAC Publications

Fall on Ice – Climbing Unroped

Colorado, Eureka, First Gully

On January 30, Mark Miller (50) took a fatal fall while guiding First Gully, a four-pitch WI3 ice climb near Eureka. Miller, a climbing guide from Ouray, and his two clients were nearing the top of the low-angle climb. Miller was free soloing along-side the clients, giving pointers as one led the pitch, when he fell. According to the clients, a bulge of ice fractured unexpectedly under Miller and carried him down the route, about 800 feet. After descending, the climbers (one of whom was an emergency-room doctor) confirmed that Miller had died from injuries sustained in the fall. (Sources: Rock and Ice magazine, Climbing magazine.)

ANALYSIS

Miller was an influential member of the climbing community and an accomplished climber, with over 20 years of guiding experience. Even though First Gully was well within his soloing abilities, ice conditions are never certain. By climbing alongside his client, it is possible that Miller was forced out of the optimal line on the route and onto less solid ice. Fall protection should be considered whenever the consequences are major, even if the likelihood of a fall is very small. (Source: The Editors.)

Images

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