



## AAC Publications

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### **Fall on Snow – Inadequate Equipment**

Montana, Glacier National Park, Lithoid Cusp

**On June 27, experienced mountaineers Jack Beard (60) and David Steele (27) attempted a new route to the Lithoid Cusp, a dramatic spire atop the large east-facing wall between Ipasha Peak and Mt. Merritt. Their route involved much scrambling to reach a steep snow couloir that led another 800 feet to the ridgeline.** The two continued unroped up the snow, using ice axes and crampons. At 11:30 a.m., about halfway up the couloir, Beard slipped in the soft snow and slid to the bottom of the couloir, continuing over rocks and a cascade of snowmelt until he came to a stop on a small outcropping after sliding about 600 feet.

Steele climbed down to his partner, who had fractures in his ribs, spine, and right forearm, as well as a concussion. He built a platform where Beard could rest, anchored him, marked the area with a high-visibility yellow tent, and prepared Beard to spend the night. At 2 p.m., he left for help, reascending the snow couloir to the ridge and then descending the far side toward Mokowanis Lake. At 5:45 p.m. he found a hiker with an InReach satellite communication device who was able to send a message requesting help. Steele arranged to meet a ranger who would hike in his direction, and they connected at 8:15 p.m. Rangers called for a helicopter rescue. A Two Bear Air Rescue helicopter lowered a crew member to Beard's ledge, picked him up, and transported him to the valley and an ambulance.

### **ANALYSIS**

By email, Steele described the climbers' decision-making before and during this incident: "In the wake of the accident, both Jack and I spent a bunch of time talking and considering what we could have done differently. The trip placed diverse needs on our gear and ourselves: overnight gear, a complete alpine rack, two ropes, food and fuel, plus snow climbing equipment. We went about as light as we felt comfortable, which meant crampons and one ice tool each. We agree that two tools would have been more secure and could have prevented Jack's slip. His ice tool was especially compact—it worked well for piton use, but that meant it wasn't suited to self arrest. An axe with a more alpine-style pick and longer handle would have been a better choice.

"Unseasonably hot weather at the time of the accident meant that the snow surface wasn't even close to refreezing at night; it's unlikely that an earlier start would have yielded more consolidated snow. Protection in the rock along the snow couloir was poor at best, and we elected not to carry a stack of pickets to make running protection. Because we couldn't protect the climb, our opinion was that roping together just endangered both climbers. We elected to solo both the rock and the snow based on our comfort levels.

"It's worth mentioning that Jack is back out in the mountains and we're still climbing together."  
(Sources: David Steele and Jack Beard.)

## Images



The red line shows a new route attempted by two climbers in Glacier National Park. (1) Site of the fall. (2) Point where climber stopped falling (600 feet lower) and was later rescued



Accident in Glacier

Article Details

Author	David Steele and Jack Beard
Publication	ANAM
Volume	11
Issue	69
Page	75
Copyright Date	2016
Article Type	Accident reports