



AAC Publications

Avalanche

Washington, Granite Mountain

On the morning of December 31, American Alpine Club President Doug Walker, along with two friends, set out to climb Granite Mountain, west of Snoqualmie Pass. They planned to follow the winter route that avoids the active main avalanche chute on the south side of the mountain. This route skirts the hazard to the west and eventually gains a shoulder leading to the open summit slopes above. Near treeline, Walker's friends decided to turn back, and he continued to the summit solo. Late that afternoon, SAR resources were dispatched when he did not return to the parking lot. An advance team reached the summit lookout that night and reported no signs of Walker. Midmorning on New Year's Day, searchers followed a fresh avalanche path that ran below the summit slopes into the trees west of the line of ascent. Walker's body was found amid the debris, just below treeline.

ANALYSIS

Granite Mountain is a popular hiking and training destination for climbers, as it is very close to Seattle—Walker had climbed it countless times. The weather on December 31 was clear, sunny, and windy, with a freezing level at 1,000 feet. Other parties that day had noted wind slab forming on the steeper terrain near the summit. Familiarity with a mountain has many times affected the decision-making of even the most experienced climbers. Most of his friends were not surprised to hear that Doug wanted to tag the summit. He was very familiar with the hazards of winter snow travel, but this time they claimed his life. (Source: The Editors.)

Images

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