



AAC Publications

Fatal Ground Fall – Climbing Alone

Colorado, Front Range, The Ironclads

On October 25, the body of 60-year-old Dr. James Lee “Jim” Detterline was found at the base of a small cliff in the Ironclads, a group of rock fins south of Rocky Mountain National Park. Detterline was a prominent figure in the national park, where he worked for more than two decades as Longs Peak supervisory climbing ranger, and where he was involved in hundreds of rescue missions. Known as “Mr. Longs Peak,” he holds the record for most ascents (428) of the 14,259-foot mountain.

Detterline is known to have solo climbed at the Ironclads in the past, and his body was found with gear consistent with roped solo climbing. He died from internal injuries, likely due to a fall from one of the formations while attempting either to set up or remove a system for self-belayed climbing.

ANALYSIS

Jim Detterline was an extremely accomplished climber with decades of experience. His death illustrates the need for constant vigilance, even on familiar ground, and especially when scrambling unroped and/or climbing alone. When setting up a top-rope or other rope systems, constant edge awareness is essential. A temporary anchor often can be arranged to allow safe access to a cliff edge. (Source: The Editors.)

Images

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