



## AAC Publications

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### **Long Fall On Snow – Unable to Self-Arrest**

New Hampshire, Mt. Washington, Tuckerman Ravine

**At about 1 p.m. on February 24, a climber took a long sliding fall while ascending near the top of Right Gully in Tuckerman Ravine.** The subject slipped on very hard, icy snow and was unable to self-arrest with an ice axe. The resulting high-speed slide was halted below the gully by exposed bushes and rocks. The fall totaled approximately 300 vertical feet.

With the help of a climbing partner, the subject was able to walk down to Hermit Lake, from which U.S. Forest Service Snow Rangers transported the subject via snowmobile to Pinkham Notch. The primary injury was presumed to be bruised or fractured ribs.

### **ANALYSIS**

The subject and witnesses to this accident unanimously were surprised the outcome was not more serious. The subject was indeed lucky to slide into a generally bushy area as opposed to the many nearby rocks that would have likely resulted in greater injuries. Further, the subject was not wearing a helmet and was very fortunate to avoid hitting the head. The party had climbed Right Gully several times before, and other than the lack of helmets they were properly equipped with mountaineering boots, crampons, and ice axes.

While firm conditions can inspire confidence for climbers traveling uphill with crampons, it can be incredibly difficult to arrest a fall once sliding with any amount of speed, even with skilled use of an ice axe. It is better to prevent falls in the first place with solid snow climbing skills and careful movement. When unexpected conditions are encountered, it may be preferable to downclimb and retreat before climbing into a more precarious situation. (Source: Mount Washington Avalanche Center.)

**Images**

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