



## AAC Publications

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### Rockfall Fatalities

California, Sierra Nevada, Red Slate Mountain

**On October 26, experienced climbers Jennifer Shedden (34) and Michelle Xue (22) approached Red Slate Mountain (13,156 feet), planning to climb its North Couloir.** The route is a moderate snow couloir, approximately 1,500 feet high, that usually requires some ice and mixed climbing in autumn conditions. When the two did not check in by late on October 27, the day they had planned to climb, friends alerted Mono County Search and Rescue, which deployed along with a California Highway Patrol helicopter. Search and rescue located the climbers on October 28, at about 12,400 feet, partway up the couloir, and determined both were deceased due to a large rockfall event.

### ANALYSIS

Rockfall is common in Sierra couloirs, especially later in the day when temperatures rise. According to reports, the climbers planned to start their ascent before dawn to avoid this hazard. Members of Mono SAR observed no equipment failure, and the two climbers were found at a well-built and functioning anchor, where they apparently had been resting before continuing the climb. [Editor's

Note: There likely was no option in this case, but whenever possible, climbers should seek sheltered belay stances in couloirs, which are natural funnels for falling debris.] (Sources: Mono County Sheriff's Office and Rock and Ice.)

## Images



The North Couloir of Red Slate Mountain in snowy October condition.

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