



AAC Publications

Fatal Fall Caused By Rockfall – Off-Route

California, High Sierra, Mt. Sill

On August 23, a party of four was attempting Mt. Sill in the Palisade Range via an unknown route (possibly the North Couloir). The climbers got off-route on the upper section and descended a short distance to reassess. At this point, a large block dislodged and fell, striking a 54-year-old male climber in the head and causing a tumbling fall of about 1,000 feet onto the upper Palisade Glacier. The remaining members downclimbed onto the glacier, confirmed their partner was deceased, and called for help via satellite messenger. They spent the night nearby, and the deceased climber was extracted from the glacier the next day by helicopter.

ANALYSIS

Loose rock is common throughout the Sierra Nevada but especially in the Palisade Range. Natural rockfall is common during the day as temperatures rise, as well as during high-wind events. Sometimes rockfall can be heard before it reaches climbers, but in other instances it occurs without warning.

All party members should familiarize themselves with their intended objective by studying topo maps, guidebooks, images, and other resources, because straying off-route increases the chances of encountering loose rock. In this case, the rockfall appears to have been natural. We have no information to suggest that the climbers could have predicted or avoided this event, highlighting the objective risks of technical travel in the Palisade Range. (Source: Inyo County Search and Rescue.)

Images

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