



AAC Publications

Fatal Fall on Snow – Climbing Alone, Failure to Self-Arrest

New Hampshire, Mt. Washington, Huntington Ravine

On February 10, Jeremy Ullmann, 37, was attempting to solo climb Central Gully, an easy snow and ice climb in Huntington Ravine. His partner had turned back earlier in the day. After Ullmann was reported overdue at 4:45 p.m., search and rescue teams and U.S. Forest Service snow rangers assembled to search the terrain near the route. His body was found in the Fan, a rocky area approximately 300 feet below the climb, at 7:45 p.m. He was equipped with crampons and two ice axes and had attempted to self-arrest. (Source: Mt. Washington Avalanche Center.)

ANALYSIS

On the day of the incident, temperatures had dropped to around 0°F on the mountain following several days of above-freezing temperature and rain. According to the Mt. Washington Avalanche Center, very icy conditions had developed. Although the slope angle where Ullmann fell was only 35 degrees, self-arrest would have been very difficult in these conditions.

When traveling over icy terrain, even on relatively low-angle ground, careful movement and use of crampons is more important than self-arrest, which may not be successful. Particular care must be taken to avoid catching one's crampon points in clothing or straps—this climber's crampon straps had not been trimmed. An anchored belayer could have stopped this fall, but it is not unusual to climb this slope without a belay. According to the Mt. Washington Avalanche Center report, the patient's injuries might have been reduced by wearing the helmet that he carried on his pack, but they likely still would have been fatal because of the high-speed slide into rocks. (Source: The Editors.)

Images

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