



## AAC Publications

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### Fall on Snow

California, Eastern Sierra, Mt. Humphreys, North Couloir

**On June 10, Inyo SAR was notified of an overdue climber (age 59 and experienced) in the Mt. Humphreys area, west of Bishop. His wife reported that the climber's intended itinerary was to ascend the North Couloir (ice and snow up to 50°+) and descend the east ridge. Both are popular routes to summit.**

Inyo SAR deployed three ground teams into the field by 8:30 a.m., heading for the east ridge, the North Couloir, and the approaches to the North Couloir. At 10 a.m., SAR learned that friends of the climber had begun to search the night before and had located the deceased climber near the bergschrund at the base of the North Couloir at approximately 12,000 feet. Inyo SAR and the California Highway Patrol helicopter completed the recovery of the subject by 12 p.m.

Using the climber's Strava track, Inyo SAR was able to determine that he had summited Mt. Humphreys, then returned via the North Couloir. It was obvious from the tracks that the climber had taken a fall from high in the couloir, hit rocks on the right side of the gully, slid over the bergschrund, and come to rest on a snow shelf just below the bergschrund. Judging from his tracks, he did not move again once he came to rest at the bergschrund.

### ANALYSIS

We do not know the cause of the fall, but other parties reported hearing a large rockfall that morning, though no evidence of this was observed near the climber's up track or the slide marks. We also noted there was still abundant spring snow and it was a warm day. The footing in the couloir would have been treacherous as the day warmed up, and arresting a slip would have been difficult. The subject was well equipped for snow travel and carried a climbing rope. We cannot say with confidence that the snow conditions played a factor in the subject's fall, but we recommend alpine starts for better snow stability and to anticipate changing (worsening) snow conditions during the day. (Source: Inyo County Search and Rescue.)

**Images**

## Article Details

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