



AAC Publications

Loose Rock

Little Cottonwood Canyon, Gate Buttress

On Sunday, October 10, Mason Boos (25) and two companions were climbing in the Gate Buttress area. At about 1:15 p.m., Boos was unroped and traversing 3rd-class terrain below Satan's Corner (5.8) to reach the start of Half-A-Finger (5.9+). He pulled on a large block, reported to be the size of a Subaru. The block dislodged, causing him to fall 20 to 30 feet. "After he hit the ground, the boulder he had pulled out fell on top of him before continuing to roll down the mountain," said Sgt. Melody Cutler of Greater Salt Lake's Unified Police Department. The boulder nearly hit two other climbers further below, though they escaped unscathed.

Boos' climbing partner was belaying another climber nearby and was able to quickly reach him, establish him in a stable position, and call emergency services. Boos was not breathing, and his partner began CPR. Other climbers set up fixed lines for EMS to access the scene quickly and safely. When EMS arrived shortly afterward, Boos had not been breathing unassisted for over 20 minutes and was pronounced dead.

ANALYSIS

Boos was very experienced and a well-known member of the Salt Lake climbing and skiing community. He was on familiar ground, having frequently climbed at Gate Buttress. The traverse he fell from is a common route to scramble back and forth between two popular sub-areas within Gate Buttress: Beckey's Wall and the Dihedrals Area.

Loose rock is an ever-present hazard that can be difficult or impossible to fully mitigate. Best practices include wearing a helmet, testing holds, and using a rope and gear for protection when practical. [For more information, see *Safer 4th Class*, by Tico Gangulee, ANAC 2018.] Still, rapid unroped movement on 3rd-class terrain is often standard practice. Given that fact, it is imperative to remain vigilant for loose rock even in heavy-use areas such as Little Cottonwood Canyon. (Sources: Salt Lake County Search and Rescue, News Reports, and Climbing Magazine.)

Images

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