



AAC Publications

FATAL FALL ON ROCK

Colorado, Colorado National Monument, Independence Monument

In the late morning of April 30, Andrew Whiteside (male, 67) fell while leading the first pitch of Otto's Route (5 pitches, 5.8+). The first pitch is 5.4 and starts on the northwest side of the formation, climbing a ramp with some chopped steps before ending on a large ledge.

Not many details are available, but Whiteside was climbing with two other partners when the accident occurred. He was out of sight of his partners when he fell approximately 30 feet, landing on a ledge that was about halfway up the pitch. He was wearing a helmet at the time but his death was later determined to be the result of multiple blunt force trauma.

ANALYSIS

Otto's Route is a popular climb that summits an impressive desert tower. It was first climbed in 1911 using drilled and chopped holds, leaving behind a moderate desert classic. "Moderate" does not equate with hazard-free. While Otto's route has human-engineered holds at the critical parts, the rock is sandy and soft, and the climbing can be quite run-out. The route is littered with ledges. Placing plenty of gear is recommended on this and other soft-rock routes, regardless of the grade. As "j mo" on Mountainproject.com wrote, "Many of us will make a choice not to sew up this route because it is easy terrain where you 'won't fall'.... It is super important to keep in mind how quickly things go from fun to fatal in climbing." (Sources: Outtherecolorado.com and Mountainproject.com.)

Images



Otto's Route on Independence Monument was the site of an April 2022 fatality. The route starts on the left side of the shaded face and ends on the sunlit capstone near the right edge of the formation.

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