



## AAC Publications

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### **FATAL FALL WHILE PULLING RAPPEL ROPE**

Colorado, Mt. Evans, Black Wall

**On September 13, Maya Humeau (female, 22) fell from a large ledge at the start of Cary Granite (5.11c), a five-pitch route on the Black Wall, near Mt. Evans.** Humeau and her climbing partner, Mathias Gruber (male), were a very experienced team.

The pair completed three simul-rappels to a large, sloping ledge, about 200 feet above the ground, the normal start for Cary Granite and neighboring climbs. The two detached from the rappel rope, and Humeau began to pull the rope.

Gruber wrote to ANAC: “We were at the ledge at the base of the raps. If I recall correctly, there were no fixed anchors. As the ledge felt quite large, we felt comfortable being untethered as she pulled the rope down.” Gruber bent over to lace up his shoes then heard Humeau gasp. He turned and saw her stumble and fall from the ledge, backward and out of control, still holding the rope as she fell. Gruber lunged to grab the rope, but that would not have changed things, as his partner was not attached to it.

Gruber recalled, “It happened so very fast and so suddenly that everything was still. In shock, I began calling out to Maya as I scrambled down ledges. I heard no response. The terrain below the ledge was 5th class in a straight line, but you could probably make it 4th with some wandering back and forth. I was in a focused haze as I downclimbed to where she lay.”

Gruber found Humeau within a few minutes. She was still alive as he stabilized her and called 911. To get cell service he, “ran as fast as I could in the direction of the parking lot, traversing the slope and checking my phone every few seconds.” Three hours later, a SAR team arrived, but Humeau had expired just minutes prior.

### **ANALYSIS**

Humeau was an accomplished and experienced climber, with ascents of very hard trad climbs, long free routes, an El Cap solo, and first ascents in Alaska’s Arrigetch Peaks in a few short years. Soloing was an integral part of her regimen. Gruber recalls, “We never even discussed roping up to walk over to the route. We had spent many days ropeless in the past. Maya was by no means uncomfortable in this type of terrain.”

Gruber added, “I believe it was a change in the friction of the pull that caused her to lose balance and begin a backward fall. The ledge is probably five feet at its widest, but it is all broken up and down-sloping in sections.

**A Note from ANAC Editor Pete Takeda:** I’ve been to this very ledge a half dozen times and pulled the rope exactly as Humeau did. Perhaps the only thing worth noting is that when one is in an exposed position, one should weigh the worst-case scenario. Establishing an anchor might take precious time, but it might pay off in the end. On alpine rock routes, the boundary between level ground and actual climbing is often comprised of long stretches of terrain which, though moderate, can be deadly. (Sources: Mathias Gruber and the Editors.)

**Editor's Note:** After publication of the 2023 ANAC, Mt. Evans was officially renamed Mt. Blue Sky.

## Images



Looking down the Black Wall rappel approach. The yellow oval marks the ledge from which climbers start Cary Granite—and from where Maya Humeau fell.

## Article Details

Author	Mathias Gruber and The Editors
Publication	ANAM
Volume	13
Issue	76
Page	42
Copyright Date	2023
Article Type	Accident reports