



AAC Publications

FATAL FALL WHILE DOWNCLIMBING

Colorado, Clear Creek Canyon, Secret Waterfall

On January 19, Tucker Rowan (24) had finished a top-rope solo of Secret Waterfall (110', WI3) and was attempting to downclimb the loose, rock gully on the climber's right side of the flow when he slipped. The 60 to 70-foot fall from near the top of the gully was fatal. According to an eyewitness, climbing guide Sam Sala, a substantial amount of rock and debris fell along with the climber, but it was not clear if Rowan had pulled a rock loose or was himself hit by the falling rock.

Sala and other guides responded and provided CPR. With no cell service at the crag, one of the group went down to call 911. SAR was notified at 11 a.m., but by early afternoon, Rowan was declared deceased.

ANALYSIS

Sala, who is very familiar with this ice flow, said that the long walk-off and the fact that Rowan's 60-meter rope would not quite reach the ground via rappel must have prompted the decision to downclimb. Sala wrote that, while he could understand the decision to scramble down, the safest and easiest option would be to rappel off the bolts, preferably with a longer rope. (Source: Sam Sala.)

Images



Secret Waterfall in Clear Creek Canyon has a bolted anchor (yellow circle), yet requires a 70-meter rope to safely rappel. In January, a climber fell to his death while downclimbing an adjacent gully (red oval).

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