



AAC Publications

FATALITY – Probable Fall on Ice, Climbing Alone

New York, Adirondacks, Mt. Colden

On March 16, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) dispatch center received a report that a family member had not returned from a climbing trip to the High Peaks of the Adirondacks. Forest rangers checked the trailhead and found the 63-year-old male subject's vehicle and confirmed that he signed the trailhead register on March 11. He intended to camp for two nights and climb Trap Dike, a 2,000- foot technical ice and snow climb on the west face of Mt. Colden.

Roughly 15 inches of new snow fell in the area between the time the subject arrived at the trailhead and when he was reported overdue, complicating search efforts. A search team was dispatched to climb and search the Trap Dike and the descent trail, with negative results. Investigations determined that a local climbing guide had briefly interacted with the subject on the afternoon of March 16. The subject stated he would be climbing Trap Dike the following day. He was hiking toward a campsite roughly 2.5 miles from the start of the route. More search crews were assigned to nearby drainages and trails, and a helicopter was used to search from the air.

The following day, 16 rangers and two trained local climbers were assigned to the search. Avalanche danger on all aspects and elevations was high, and it was suspected the subject may have been caught in an avalanche during the climb, as the route follows a known slide path. On day three, 28 people were assigned to the search. A climbing team was again assigned to climb and probe Trap Dike to search for more clues. The subject's backpack was discovered roughly 75 feet below the crux ice bulge, leading searchers to uncover the remains of the climber buried under five feet of windblown snow. The remains were packaged and lowered about 500 feet down the route and carried to a helicopter that landed on Avalanche Lake for extrication to Lake Placid.

ANALYSIS

It was later learned that the subject was training for a future trip to the Himalayas. If he followed the schedule he had given to his family and the climbing guide, he would have been climbing in near-zero visibility with heavy snowfall and winds exceeding 30 miles per hour.

The subject suffered trauma to the head, torso, and legs. While there is no way to know for sure what caused the accident, it is suspected he fell from somewhere on the crux ice bulge (at the time in WI3-conditions), impacting ice and rock approximately 50 feet below him. One of his ice tools was found by another ice climber before he was reported missing. It was believed he had two ice tools. The other was never recovered.

While training is an integral part of expedition process, one must err on the side of safety. More than one climber in 2022 with expedition ambitions suffered a severe accident during trip preparation. (Sources: New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and the Editors.)

Images



Trap Dike is a classic winter mountaineering route that ascends an exposed and direct line to the summit of Mt. Colden. This route also sits in the High Peaks Wilderness of the Adirondacks, where the weather is subject to rapid changes, extreme cold, and windy conditions. A solo climber died here in March 2022.

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