



AAC Publications

LONG SLIDING FALL

New Hampshire, Mt. Washington, Tuckerman Ravine

On Saturday, March 26, a 25-year-old male took a 500-foot fall while attempting to descend the skier's left side of Chute. The patient reported that the fall was due to one of his ski bindings releasing in the upper part of the run. Videos showed that the patient became airborne for over 50 vertical feet after he hit the rocks to the side of Chute and then continued to tomahawk down the slope to the ravine floor.

U.S. Forest Service snow rangers and Mount Washington Volunteer Ski Patrol were practicing high-angle litter rescue on the adjacent slopes and were able to respond quickly. The patient stated that he never lost consciousness, and an initial assessment found the patient to be alert and oriented, with some pain, tenderness, and abrasions. His helmet was cracked in several places.

Due to other people present above the rescue and coming downslope dangerously close to the patient and rescuers, the decision was made to expedite transport. After another exam, responders helped put the patient's crampons on, and the patient and ski patrol walked slowly down to the Hermit Lake ranger cabin for further assessment. After rewarming, the patient was transported by snowmobile to the road.

ANALYSIS

The patient and his party had come prepared with crampons and ice axes, and were able to safely climb the desired ski run. However, an equipment malfunction led to a sliding fall that was impossible to arrest on the icy snow surface. The weather that day was cloudy and cold, and there was no chance of the snow warming for spring skiing conditions. Several other people in the bowl that day also had long, sliding falls, but these were less consequential.

Skiers often overestimate their ability to self-arrest and underestimate the speed with which they may accelerate in a fall on icy terrain. The practiced ability to self-arrest is important for mountain travel; however, effective use of this skill is limited to softer surfaces at lower angles. Often, the best way to protect yourself is not to fall. In practice, this means recognizing the icy, hard-snow conditions and dialing back terrain choices to match abilities and for a wider margin of error.

This incident also reinforces the need for well-maintained bindings with appropriate release settings, as well as great care when stepping into bindings before a potentially consequential descent.

(Sources: Mount Washington Avalanche Center and the Editors.)

Images

Article Details

Author	Mt. Washington Avalanche Center
Publication	ANAM
Volume	13
Issue	76
Page	112
Copyright Date	2023
Article Type	Accident reports