



AAC Publications

Fatal Fall — Unroped

Montana, Glacier National Park, Livingston Range, Heavens Peak

McPartland Mountain (8,417 feet) is one of many striking summits in Glacier National Park. In August 2024, the highly consequential terrain pictured here claimed the life of a very experienced climber who had previously summited 128 peaks in the area. Photo: Anonymous.

On August 18, Grant Marcuccio (32) and a partner summited Heavens Peak (8,987 feet) at around 11:30 a.m. On that day, Marcuccio's plan was to summit the adjacent McPartland Mountain (8,417 feet) and then return to rejoin his partner. After that, they planned to descend to the highway.

Marcuccio departed Heavens Peak around 12:35 p.m., heading south to the adjacent summit. Sometime after, he elected to remove his backpack, possibly to lighten his load during the traverse. He was not using technical gear or a rope. Either on his way to or coming back from the summit of McPartland, Marcuccio slipped and fell to his death. His partner waited until about 8 p.m. When it became apparent that Marcuccio wouldn't return before dark, the waiting climber descended, got to cell service, and called SAR. After a weeklong search, the missing climber's body was found.

ANALYSIS

Marcuccio was adept in this terrain and good at route-finding and reading the rock. He had previously climbed McPartland and his friends noted that the terrain between that summit and Heavens Peak involved 5th-class downclimbing. His friends strongly speculate that this accident was not the result of a route-finding error, but rather an unfortunate instance of slipping or tripping.

This and similar incidents in this book (see page 56) result in part from momentary inattention combined with loose rock and slick gravel. Locals note that very little climbing in Glacier National Park is done with protection due to the abysmal rock quality. One wrote to ANAC: "We go to great lengths to find [navigable] routes through and around these peaks. They are often exposed scrambles."

Surviving friends add:

- Though it would not have altered the outcome, having an inReach with live tracking would have saved Marcuccio's family and friends the week-long agony of not knowing where he had come to rest. It also would have reduced the resources needed to locate him.
- It is easy to say, "Don't solo!"—but there's no certainty that being with a partner would have changed the outcome.
- It is possible that the body recovery would have been much quicker had Marcuccio worn bright-colored clothing as it would have been easier to spot from a helicopter. (Source: Anonymous.)

Images



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