



AAC Publications

Fatal Rappel Fall

Wyoming, Devils Tower

On September 22, a rock climber named Stewart Phillip Porter (21) died from injuries sustained during a fall at Devils Tower National Monument. The accident occurred shortly before 8 p.m. Devils Tower Law Enforcement was informed, and responding staff found the injured party and their climbing partner at around 8:40 p.m. Porter was pronounced dead on scene by paramedics.

Porter and his partner had summited and were rappelling the second pitch of El Cracko Diablo when Porter fell. His partner was stranded and was later rescued from the wall, with help from Devils Tower Lodge Climbing Guides and Buck Wild Climbing Guides.

ANALYSIS

According to comments on the accident that appeared on MountainProject.com, Porter had cut his 70-meter rope down to 66 meters and apparently there was no middle mark. At the end of the rappel, the rope ends were uneven. He rappelled off the short end, taking the rope with him when he fell.

The day before, Porter had climbed a route called Soler and did the El Cracko Diablo rappel descent. He then climbed El Cracko, posting on Mountain Project, "After Soler, rapped this [El Cracko Diablo] with a 66m in three raps, then climbed this to the top." It is not known which route he climbed prior to his death on the rappel descent.

As the Park Service states: "Over the 100 plus year climbing history at the Tower, there have only been seven climbing deaths. The majority of climbing accidents and deaths on the Tower occur during the rappel. The National Park Service does not maintain anchors—inspect all anchors and back them up if necessary. Ensure you know the location of your rappel route before you begin. Start rappels over the nose of columns to prevent ropes from jamming in cracks. Avoid knocking loose rock onto climbers below. Many rappels require two ropes; know the distance of your planned rappel before beginning." (Sources: NPS and MountainProject.com.)

Images

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