



AAC Publications

Fall. on Snow

Washington, Mt. Rainier, Muir Snowfield

A popular ski tour on Mt. Rainier ends at Camp Muir, a high-altitude refuge at the 10,188-foot level, seen here in the yellow rectangle. Sparse snow led to a falling accident in November 2024. Walter Siegmund—Wikimedia

I am a 29-year-old female who is new to ski touring. My boyfriend and I were touring to Camp Muir on Mt. Rainier on November 9, 2024. We were familiar with the area, having hiked and done mountaineering there. It was great weather, a little windy, but good visibility. The coverage as we were going up was a mix of ice/snow and rocks since it was early season. We were making great time skinning up and were about halfway up to Camp Muir (10,188 feet) when I lost an edge in an icy section. I tried to catch myself but I couldn't and next thing I knew I was sliding over rocks.

This section happened to be rather steep and with lots of exposed rocks. I wasn't able to self-arrest and at one point I even flipped. It happened so fast that next thing I knew I stopped partway down the slope, a slide of about 50 feet.

I was very fortunate in that aside from bruising my left side (thighs, arm, and ribs), I was fine. We actually continued our ascent for another 20–30 minutes before the adrenaline wore off. I took several ibuprofens and we made the call to turn around and go down.

ANALYSIS

This was one of my first ski tours. Camp Muir is considered a good beginner area as there is minimal avalanche risk and in terms of slope angle, it compares to a blue run. While the early-season conditions and coverage made it more spicy, we were both comfortable up to the point that I fell. I think neither of us realized the hazard or steepness of the slope necessarily until that happened. I think waiting for better snow coverage is probably the way to go for beginner ski tourers.

Reflecting back later, if I had been more injured and unable to ski out on my own, it would have been a very unpleasant experience. I was extremely lucky to not twist or break an ankle falling with my skis attached. It was windy and the cloud cover was coming in so a helicopter might have had trouble landing for a rescue. There were plenty of other skiers on the mountain and several who saw the accident stopped and double-checked that I was okay. We were both prepared and had layers, an emergency bivy, and plenty of food and water. I was wearing a helmet when I fell and was very happy for that, even though I did not hit my head.

The fact that I was new to ski touring could have contributed to the accident. I was also skiing on a brand-new setup that I'd never skied on before, though I don't know if being more experienced with the gear would have prevented the fall. (Source: Anonymous.)

Images



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