Long Fall in Ski Boots

California, Alpine County, Round Top

On April 24, a solo skier summited Round Top (10,381 feet), in the Sierra Nevada near the Kirkwood Mountain Resort ski area. After he summited, he traversed toward the Crescent Moon Couloir, his planned descent. On the traverse, the skier found himself trapped between a steep rock slope and a traversing couloir that he did not feel he could re-ascend. He then decided to descend without skis, down and across the steep talus toward another skiable slope. With his skis and poles in his hands, he lost his footing and fell. He tumbled over a 50-foot cliff, and then continued to fall another 800 feet before coming to a rest.

The skier, who was extremely lucky to have survived his fall, lost almost all of his gear and had to ski on one ski for a mile and a half and then hike four more miles back to the trailhead. There, he was met by a county sheriff, who called search and rescue. As a result of the fall, the skier suffered traumatic rhabdomyolysis and traumatic emphysema, and he broke his arm, his heel, and two fingers. He also suffered frostbite and hypothermia. He was in the hospital for 17 days.

ANALYSIS

While there was no avalanche hazard, ski touring carries its own risks. As the skier traversed toward his chosen line, he realized the run didn't go clean—at that point, he needed to account for the change or return the way he'd come. He continued, crossing highly exposed terrain. Stowing skis and having an ice axe in hand would have given him four points of contact and additional security.

Skiing alone in steep, consequential terrain is a double-edged sword: It can heighten the senses and enhance the experience, but a fall without a satellite communicator is an easy way to end up stranded or dead. Carry one. Have a rescue plan. This skier self-extricated to the trailhead, but given the fall he took, he was lucky to be alive. (Source: The skier.)

Images

Article Details

Author	The Skier
Publication	ANAM
Volume	1
Issue	14
Page	137
Copyright Date	2026
Article Type	Accident reports