



AAC Publications

Avalanche – Poor Position

Colorado, Rocky Mountain National Park, Loch Vale

Loch Vale is a popular north-facing ice climbing area at about 10,000 feet in elevation. At approximately 3 p.m. on December 21, two climbers began to free solo Mo' Flo' Than Go, a short WI2/3 route. They told a group of four climbers who were gathered under the ice curtain on the far left side of the route that they planned to establish a top-rope above a mixed climb farther to the right.

"Within a few minutes," one of the climbers in the second group reported, "we heard a rumble and saw a large amount of snow slide over the ice cliff and run downhill to climber's right from our position. We could not see the other climbers. One of our group called to them to see if they were OK. Climber B had been swept off the top of the flow to the bottom, but he indicated he was OK. Climber A managed to stay on the ice face. One of our climbing ropes had been swept downhill about 20 feet, but otherwise our group was unaffected. We began to pack up and belayed one of our climbers up to recover our top-rope. Climber A downclimbed, took the coiled rope that Climber B had been carrying, and then climbed back up the same route to establish a top-rope.

Analysis

The avalanche appeared to empty much of the steep, north-facing bowl above Mo' Flo' Than Go. Approximately eight inches of new snow had fallen during the day, mostly heavier, wet flakes and some graupel. The snow appears to have slid on top of older, somewhat consolidated snow. This particular climb has a small bowl directly above it that quickly gets loaded with snow. The person in our party who established our toprope said he painstakingly avoided the bowl because of the snow deposition.

Editor's note: Since ice climbers often are not equipped with avalanche transceivers, shovels, or probes, awareness and prudence are their primary defenses in avalanche terrain. Learn to recognize avalanche-prone terrain and conditions, and read your area's avalanche forecast before climbing in any zone where avalanches are possible.

Images

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