



AAC Publications

Rockfall, Avalanche

Colorado, Front Range, Torreys Peak

On June 6, a group (undisclosed number) of climbers preparing for a trip to the Pacific Northwest camped near the Stevens Gulch trailhead for Grays and Torreys peaks. They planned to start early the next morning in order to practice rope and snow-travel skills on steep, snow-covered terrain. They left the trailhead about 4:30 a.m. and followed the summer trail into the alpine area below the east face of 14,267-foot Torreys Peak. They formed a single roped group and began ascending Dead Dog Couloir, a classic gully that's often skied in the spring. They moved up the initial snow slope as a rope team, placing snow pickets.

At 8:15 a.m. they were about halfway up the couloir and stopped for a short break. They had started moving up the couloir again when, shortly before 8:55 a.m., a section of rock on the climber's right side of the couloir detached, showering the group with rocks and releasing a small loose-wet avalanche. The elevation was 13,500 feet, with a slope angle of 40°.

One of the climbers was hit by moving debris but traveled only a short distance down the slope. Two of the climbers were struck by rocks; one was injured. The group provided first-aid to the injured climber. Two Flight for Life helicopters dropped SAR teams, but the entire group traveled back to the trailhead without assistance.

ANALYSIS

This incident occurred on an east-facing route in early June, and as such it warmed up rapidly when the sun hit. The group got a fairly early start, but they knew they'd be moving slowly since they were going to be roped. The accident happened almost 4.5 hours after they started hiking, and they were still fairly low in the couloir. This suggests they should have started considerably earlier for safer travel. The Colorado Avalanche Information Center said that warmer temperatures were loosening the rock and snow, making for treacherous conditions. "Anywhere there's snow, there's potential for an avalanche," said Ethan Greene, director at CAIC, to CBS4. "If you're heading into alpine areas, there's loose rock and loose snow. It's beautiful weather, but you have to be careful." (Source: Colorado Avalanche Information Center, CBS4.)

Images



The Dead Dog Couloir on Torrey's Peak, showing (A) origin of the rockfall and (B) location of the party hit by a rock and snow avalanche.

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