



## AAC Publications

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### **Sliding Fall on Snow – Inadequate Crampons**

New Hampshire, White Mountains, Mt. Washington

**On March 14, at approximately 5:15 p.m., a winter climber took a long sliding fall while descending a steep section of the Lion Head Winter Route on Mt. Washington.** He was part of a group of three who all carried ice axes but were wearing lightweight hiking boots with Microspikes-style traction devices. A local guide who was also a paramedic/ER nurse was descending with clients and witnessed the movements of the team of three, noting they were attempting to glissade in some places and scooting down on their butts in others. Shortly before the long fall, one of them slid some distance, in the process losing their ice axe, which the guide returned to them.

Above the rock step—a stretch of steep, often icy ledges about 30 feet high—another member of this party slipped, slid the length of the steep section, struck his head on a tree, was knocked unconscious, and sustained a six-inch laceration to the forehead, coming to rest in a patch of trees in the fall line below. The guide assisted his clients to safety, treated the patient, and then short-roped the injured climber down to walking terrain. He accompanied the patient and the party to the road at Pinkham Notch, arriving at 9:30 p.m. by headlamp.

#### **ANALYSIS**

The team of three was using the wrong equipment for a trip above treeline in the Presidential Range, where summer hiking trails turn into mountaineering routes in the winter. In these conditions, full crampons with strap-on or cuff bindings offer much better security; many brands work reasonably well even when attached to inappropriately soft and uninsulated boots. Microspikes-style devices are great for snow-packed low-angled trails under 15° to 20° in steepness, but the rubber straps stretch and come loose on steeper terrain, and the short points do not penetrate snow to grip the firm surface beneath.

Three other winter climbers suffered long falls on Mt. Washington in early 2021 while using Microspikes-style traction devices instead of crampons. Long sliding falls kill more people in the Presidential Range than hypothermia or avalanches. Invest in stiff-soled mountaineering boots and crampons, and get proper training for self-arrest with an ice axe. (Source: Mount Washington Avalanche Center.)

## Images



On January 9, in a similar incident to the one analyzed above, two winter climbers with Microspikes-style traction devices and no ice axes tumbled about 500 feet down the headwall of Tuckerman Ravine. One landed on a snow ledge (circled); the other continued to the bottom. Amazingly, neither was seriously injured.

## Article Details

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