

# ACCIDENT REPORT GAUSTA MARATHON. Rjukan. February 21, 2025



Norges  
klatreforbund

## For the safety commission NKF.

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On February 21, 2025, a 41-year old male British climber lost his life in an avalanche after ice climbing at Gausta Marathon in the Svadde area of Rjukan.

On Friday morning, two British climbers, aged 35 and 41 years old, set out from their car at approximately 7.30 a.m., aiming to climb Gausta Marathon, a WI3-graded ice route. The route is located in the Svadde area, about 3,4 km from Rjukan center. This was the climbers' fourth trip to Rjukan.

There exist two different guidebooks for Rjukan. In the "Heavy Water" guidebook by Rockfax, the climb is described as: "A long day out. It is possible to increase the difficulty by not choosing the path of least resistance. Continue in the snow gully when the ice ends." Further, the guidebook states: "Gausta Marathon: The two Gausta waterfalls rise over 800m, giving a long day out for most. The climbing is never very difficult, but you should be prepared for alpine conditions. Avalanche danger is also a concern in the exit gullies."

In the "Rjukan Selected Ice Climbs" guidebook by Oxford Alpine Club, the climb is described as: "The big one! Rjukan's longest climb is a prolonged adventure, requiring speed and stamina." Further, the guidebook states: "For an even better experience, continue up the upper slopes of Gaustatoppen for a magnificent alpine day out." There is no textual description of the avalanche hazard of the upper parts, but the route is in this guidebook is tagged with a symbol which translates to "High avalanche

risk". The team did not carry avalanche equipment. They were familiar with the Varsom webpage but had not checked it since they considered the Rjukan area mostly "benign" with respect to avalanches.

On the day of the accident, varsom.no stated: "Danger level 3 - Considerable avalanche danger. A weak layer of facets and surface hoar is found under wind-transported snow. The problem now exists in more places than earlier in the week. It will be easy for skiers to trigger slab avalanches in leeward areas. Naturally triggered avalanches can be expected." The full avalanche forecast is shown in a picture on the last page in this report.

The climbers, setting off around 7.45 a.m., initially had difficulty locating the track to the start of the route due to the deep snow to the base of the climb but reached it around 8.15 a.m. They decided to solo-climb the first three or four pitches. As the terrain steepened, they roped up and pitch climbed the next two sections. After this, they primarily scrambled and simul-climbed, pitching the odd steeper section, but never more than a pitches worth, to the top while keeping the rope coiled but still attached in case the terrain and/or conditions required them to pitch climb again. Approximately 1.45 p.m., they reached the end of the ice climb and took a lunch break before proceeding through the snow towards the summit.

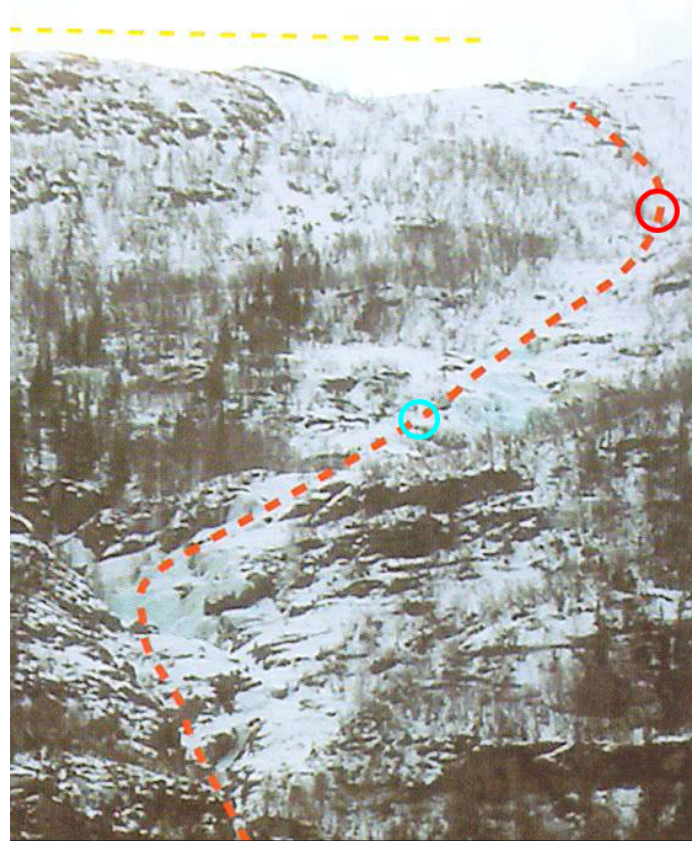
After lunch, they continued their ascent through deep snow, remaining roped together with

approximately 10 meters of rope between them while the rest was coiled. The 35-year-old climber led, followed by the 41-year-old climber. They ensured the pylons marking their exit route remained ahead of them. As they progressed, they encountered wind-affected snow slabs and observed some cracking in the snow, but did not consider it a major concern. Shortly after, around 2 p.m. they triggered an avalanche, which, carried them downwards before they came to a stop.

The 35-year-old climber was partially buried, with one leg completely covered and the other partially buried. He had suffered three broken ribs and extensive bruising. Still, he managed to free himself from the avalanche. The 41-year-old climber was found at the other end of the rope, lying on his stomach, facing downhill, covered in snow. His backpack was visible above the surface. The survivor dug out his buddy enough to clear his nose (his jaw was locked) and called Emergency Medical Communication Centre (EMCC) at 2.11 p.m. The survivor then began CPR on his buddy's back after approximately 5–10 minutes after advice of the EMCC. He tried to find a pulse but could not and did not observe any signs of breathing. However, he was unable to free him completely to turn him onto his back. After some time, the EMCC advised stopping CPR and focusing on conserving the survivor's body heat to prevent hypothermia.

The first rescuer arrived six hours after the emergency call with the second arriving an hour or so later. More of the team reached them a few hours later. The 35-year-old survivor was evacuated by stretcher, rappelling down the waterfall. The entire rescue operation for him lasted 17 hours. The 41-year-old climber's body was recovered four days later.

This tragic accident underscores the risks associated with alpine climbing, particularly the dangers of avalanche conditions in exit gullies. Despite their experience, the climbers were caught in a snow slab failure, leading to fatal consequences. Regardless of the perception of avalanche danger in areas like Rjukan, climbers should remain vigilant to the risks whenever climbing in winter.



*Facsimile from the "Heavy water" guidebook showing the upper parts of Gausta Marathon. The avalanche was triggered near the red circle. The climbers were located near the blue circle.*

# Avalanche warning for region Vest-Telemark Friday 21.02.2025

Select date



Danger level 3 - Considerable avalanche danger

Published: 2025-02-20 03:32 PM

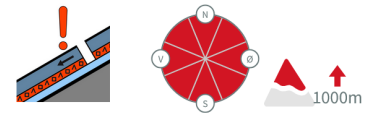
A weak layer of facets and surface hoar is found under wind-transported snow. The problem now exists in more places than earlier in the week. It will be easy for skiers to trigger slab avalanches in leeward areas. Naturally triggered avalanches can be expected.

## Avalanche problems

### Persistent weak layer (slab avalanches)

Avalanches may release spontaneously on some steep slopes. Avalanches can get large enough to bury or even kill you (size 2). Remote triggering is possible.

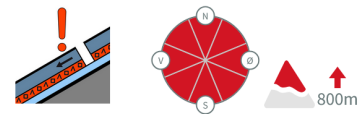
*Buried weak layer of surface hoar*



### Persistent weak layer (slab avalanches)

You can easily trigger avalanches on a few steep slopes. Avalanches can get large enough to bury or even kill you (size 2). Remote triggering is possible.

*Buried weak layer of faceted snow beneath a crust*



*The avalanche forecast of varsom.no for February 21st, 2025.*

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**NKF safety pages:**

[www.klatring.no/sikkerhet/](http://www.klatring.no/sikkerhet/)

**Accident database:**

[www.ulykkesdatabasen.no](http://www.ulykkesdatabasen.no)

**NVE avalanche warnings:**

[www.varsom.no/en/avalanches/avalanche-warnings/](http://www.varsom.no/en/avalanches/avalanche-warnings/)