

**Burke County Office
Of
Emergency Services**
Tel. 828-764-9320
Fax 828-764-9339



Emergency Management
Fire Marshal's Office
EMS Administration
Training Division

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Contact: Mike Willis, Burke EM Director
Phone: (828) 764-9321

Climbing Fatality In Burke County

Morganton, NC - On Sunday, June 30, 2019 at approximately 11:46 am, Burke County Emergency Communications Center received a call that a rock climber had fallen approximately 80 feet from Shortoff Mountain.

At approximately 1:18 pm, rescue crews reached the victim utilizing rappelling equipment while other climbers were performing CPR on the victim. The victim was pronounced deceased at approximately 1:30 pm.

The victim, 31-year-old Austin Howell of Chicago Illinois, was reportedly free climbing in one of the most difficult portions of the Linville Gorge. The specific details of the accident are unknown at this time.

Rescuers from Burke County Rescue Squad, Burke County Emergency Medical Service, Burke County Emergency Management, Burke County REACT, Lake James Fire Rescue, Chesterfield Fire Rescue, South Mountain Fire Rescue, Oak Hill Fire Rescue, Glen Alpine Fire Department, Avery County Rescue Squad, Parkway Fire Rescue, North Carolina Emergency Management, North Carolina National Guard, North Carolina Helo Aquatic Rescue Team, US Forest Service utilized equipment and manpower to extricate the victim.

The US Forest Service is investigating the accident.

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