

# Climber killed by lightning

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Heiko Tillwick (Climb SA website)

Buks Viljoen, Beeld

Johannesburg - An experienced mountain climber from Johannesburg died when he was struck by lightning in Waterval-Boven in Mpumalanga over the weekend.

Heiko Tillwick, 29, an IT specialist at Standard Bank in Johannesburg, sustained serious burns and his backpack and clothes also had burn marks. Waterval-Boven police warrant officer Alwyn Venter said Tillwick's socks melted in his shoes due to the intense heat. "There was also an ugly burn mark and deep wound to the side of his head. This is presumably where he was hit by lightning."

## Loud cracks of thunder

Tillwick, a member of the Johannesburg branch of the **Mountain Club of South Africa**, had gone to Waterval-Boven for the weekend with a group of mountaineering friends. Tillwick and a group of climbers went to climb Hallucinogen Wall, a popular cliff about 8km outside the town, for the last time on Sunday afternoon. He apparently told the group at about 15:00 that he would start climbing a cliff of about 20m as he wanted to go home earlier. Shortly after he reached the top of the cliff in Elandskloof in the foothills of the Drakensberg, there were two loud cracks of thunder. According to Alex Janse van Rensburg, co-owner of Rock & Rope Adventures in the town, none of the climbers paid any attention to it. "When they climbed the cliff and walked along the footpath on the plateau a while later, they saw Tillwick lying on the ground," said Janse van Rensburg. Venter said Tillwick's body lay in the path about a kilometre from the camping area where the climbers had spent the weekend.

## Unusual

An inquest was held on Tuesday.

Tillwick went to Waterval-Boven at least twice a month to go climbing. His wife, Irene, didn't go along this time. Dean van der Merwe, spokesperson of the Mountain Club of South Africa's search and rescue team in Gauteng, said it was extremely unusual for climbers or hikers to be struck by lightning. "Heike's case shows, however, that it can happen and people who walk or climb in mountains should be careful if there is lightning in the area. You should take steps early on to look for shelter but if you can't, squat down on your haunches, feet together with your arms around your knees." Tillwick's mother, Anna-Marie Tillwick, said on Tuesday on the mountain club's **website** that he will be buried on Friday.