

Skier Shane McConkey Killed BASE-Jumping in Italy

Contributed by Steve Casimiro
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One of the sport's brightest stars of the last 20 years, was killed today in a ski-BASE accident near Corvara, in Italy's Dolomite Mountains.

It's a sad, tragic day for skiing: Shane McConkey, one of the sport's brightest stars of the last 20 years, was killed today in a ski-BASE accident near Corvara, in Italy's Dolomite Mountains.

Ski-BASE is like BASE-jumping, i.e. parachuting off fixed objects like cliffs, buildings, and bridges, but on skis, and McConkey was one of its best-known adherents and, indeed, pioneers. The 39-year-old Red Bull athlete was filming with fellow skier J.T. Holmes and Matchstick Productions in Europe and working on a project that had been brewing for a couple of years: scouting the perfect location and preparing for a double ski-BASE jump.

"Shane's been working on this project for two or three years," said Scott Gaffney, an MSP filmmaker and close friend of McConkey's. "It's where they ski-BASE off a cliff and then fly down to another patch of snow, cut away, land, ski again, and then ski-BASE again. It's a double BASE all in one run. That's what they were filming for. And naturally, with those guys, if they aren't working on that they're going to be jumping off something else.

"So he and J.T. had built a jump on top of another cliff. I think Shane had done it the day before without a wingsuit and today he was trying it with a wingsuit."

Gaffney spoke with Holmes immediately after the accident. The other ski-BASE jumper went off the cliff first, with MSP's Steve Winter shooting video from a helicopter and two other cinematographers shooting nearby, and was landing when the accident occurred.

"Shane did a double backflip and then had some difficulty," said Gaffney. He uses these old-school Tyrolia bindings, which release upwards, and they have straps attached that he pulls on to release the

skis. So he pulls the bindings, the skis release, and then he flies away in the wingsuit.

“He got one ski off, but then was fighting to get the other one off. In the whole process, he went upside down and had one ski above him, which caused him to spiral. And then he got into a high-speed spin. He was still fighting to get out all the way down. J.T. watched the footage again because he wanted to know what happened. It was hard to see, so this is speculation, but it looked like he was going for his pilot chute. Maybe he couldn’t get to it—he’d complained before that the wingsuit was tight. But we don’t know for sure.”

McConkey’s ski/jump route yesterday.

McConkey, from Olympic Valley, California, made his first ski-BASE jump in 2003 and had over 700 under his belt. Just yesterday, he completed a dramatic ski-BASE in/near the Val Scura Couloir and posted an excited entry on Facebook and his Red Bull page, where he posted a gripping description of the descent and jump. “We nailed the Sassongher line!” he wrote. “This was extremely satisfying getting to ski such a unique line.”

McConkey was one of the most charismatic skiers the sport has ever seen, with a twisted and contagious sense of humor that seeped into nearly everything he did. His Red Bull bio says, “Being remembered as an athlete is nice, but I’d rather be remembered as that guy who helped us all ski better and faster by inventing skis with rocker and reverse sidecut shapes, and who convinced us to use fatter skis — and most importantly, to never take yourself too seriously.”

McConkey is survived by his wife Sherry, and three-year-old daughter, Ayla.

(www.theadventurelife.org)

Here is a video of him in action:

Shane McConkey from Jake Kirshner on Vimeo.

Here's a photo gallery of Shane in action:

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.gallery-item {  
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width: 33%; }  
.gallery img {  
border: 2px solid #cfcfcf;  
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.gallery-caption {  
margin-left: 0;  
}
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Shane McConkey in Bagnes, Switzerland. March 2007 cr. Red Bull Photofiles / Jancsi Hadik

Shane McConkey in Mexico. cr. Red Bull Photofiles / Alfredo Martinez

Chuck Berry, Miles Daisher, Shane McConkey at Red Bull Uncharted. Feb. 2009 in New Zealand.cr. Graeme Murray / Red Bull Photofiles

Chuck Berry and Shane McConkey Wingsuit Flying for Red Bull Uncharted in New Zealand cr. Red Bull Photofiles / cr. Graeme Murray

Shane McConkey in New Zealand - Feb. 2009 cr. Red Bull Photofiles / cr. Graeme Murray

Shane McConkey - Dec. 2008 cr. Red Bull Photofiles / cr. Yorick Carroux

Shane McConkey at the Peak 2 Peak event in Whistler, Canada - Dec. 2008 cr. Red Bull Photofiles / cr. Yorick Carroux

Shane McConkey at the Perrine Bridge Festival at Twin Falls, Idaho - Sept. 2008 cr. Red Bull Photofiles / cr. Jeremiah Klein

Shane McConkey in Idaho. cr. Red Bull Photo Files / Jeremiah Klein

Shane McConkey B.A.S.E. Jumping at The Signature at the MGM Grand, Las Vegas, NV - May 2008 cr. Red Bull Photo Files / Jeremiah Klein

Shane McConkey in his wingsuit, Volcan Popocatepetl, State of México, Mexico - Oct. 2007 cr. Red Bull Photo Files / Alfredo Martinez

Shane McConkey Wingsuit Flying - Oct. 2007 cr. Red Bull Photo Files / Alfredo Martinez

Shane McConkey freeskiing in Squaw Valley, Feb. 2006 cr. Red Bull Photo Files / Jason Shields

Shane McConkey in Squaw Valley - Feb 2006. cr. Red Bull Photo Files / Jason Shields

Shane McConkey BASE jumping in Baffin Island, Canada. May 2001. cr. Red Bull Photo Files / Bernhard Spöttel

Shane McConkey in Alaska, April 1999, for Red Bull Snow Thrill of Alaska - cr. Ulrich Grill / Red Bull Photo Files

Shane McConkey / cr. Red Bull Photo Files / Ulrich Grill