



AAC Publications

Stranded - Rope Stuck, Darkness, Inadequate Clothing

Colorado, Boulder, Third Flatiron

During the early evening of January 26, three climbers (two males, one female) became stranded while climbing the Standard Direct (5.2) on the East Face of the Third Flatiron. The group had decided to descend from partway up the route and was preparing a rappel when their rope became stuck above them, stranding them 200 feet above the ground.

“After the rope got stuck we attempted to free it ourselves, and then asked for help from nearby climbers. When neither of those solutions worked, we discussed calling for help for probably 90 minutes,” said one of the climbers. Rain started to fall, and despite being stuck 200 feet off the ground and not having appropriate clothing and equipment for the conditions, the climbers still delayed calling for help. They eventually called 911 and Rocky Mountain Rescue Group (RMRG) responded. Volunteer rescuers climbed above the stranded party on rain-soaked, slick rock, established lowering anchors, and used the anchors to assist the climbers to the ground.

Analysis

The stuck climbers were reasonably equipped to complete the climb—in daylight and with good weather. They were not prepared for complications such as a stuck rope, darkness, and deteriorating weather. First they attempted to solve the stuck rope problem themselves, and then they asked for assistance from nearby climbers. These were appropriate actions. However, even if self-rescue is being attempted, Rocky Mountain Rescue Group (RMRG) encourages calling for help early. If the problem is solved before RMRG arrives, then rescuers go home relieved. If not, rescuers are on the scene earlier. In this case it would have meant the difference between a dry, quick rescue and a wet, cold, more dangerous one.

While hiking out with the stranded party, RMRG learned that they were college students who feared they could not afford the costs of a rescue. They said, “We didn’t know that the rescuers were volunteers and that they don’t charge to rescue people.” Temperatures that night fell to near freezing. Luckily the underdressed climbers were still able to function and assist in their own rescue. (Source: Rocky Mountain Rescue Group.)

Images

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