



AAC Publications

Weather - Overdue

Washington, Mt. Rainier, Emmons/Winthrop

On August 25 a private party of five climbers led by Marcos Franco (23) attempted to summit Mt. Rainier via the Emmons/Winthrop route. While descending from the summit, they experienced high winds and low visibility and decided to shelter in place. The following day they were unable to descend, due to inclement weather. On August 27 climbing rangers reached the party at 13,100 feet and led them to Camp Schurman, where they rested overnight. A team of volunteers from the Seattle and Everett mountain rescue associations climbed to Camp Schurman to assist. All parties were out to Glacier Basin by 11:30 a.m. on August 28. After medical assessments of two individuals, it was determined that no serious injuries had been sustained by the overdue party, and they self-transported from the scene.

Analysis

This party did many things right. They practiced together. They hiked to Schurman together during their training. They climbed Mt. Adams together. A member of their party had been to the summit before. This party's main failure was not planning for the weather (which was unseasonably unstable during the period). They had a GPS but did not get GPS tracks on the way up or place any waypoints. They also did not carry any wands.

Once they summited around 11 a.m., the weather deteriorated and obscured their descent route. They were unable to descend past 13,900 feet. They spent the night in an igloo they built. The next day they descended another 800 feet, but were unable to find their way down through the maze of crevasses they had come through. They built another snow cave large enough for five people, using their ice axes and snow flukes. When we arrived on scene, I asked them what they were going to do if we didn't come. They said that they would have built a bigger snow cave. (Source: Stefan Lofgren, NPS Ranger.)

Images

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