



AAC Publications

Fall on Rock - Very Large Handhold Broke Free

Wyoming, Grand Teton National Park, Mt. Owen, Crescent Arête

On June 20 at 2:26 p.m., Teton Interagency Dispatch Center transferred an emergency cell phone call from Jeff Judkins (38) to Rescue Coordinator G. Montopoli. Judkins was climbing on the Crescent Arête (Grade III, 5.7) of Mt. Owen with climbing partner Brian Smith (37). He was several rope pitches up and lead-climbing when a door-sized rock that he was holding onto broke free. Judkins fell about 15 feet before impacting a steep rock slab, and then continued to fall another five feet or so before his climbing protection and climbing partner caught him. Neither climber was struck by the rock when it fell, but Judkins stated that he had sustained injuries to his left knee (patella) and right ankle (5 to 6 on a pain scale of 10); that he was able to rappel vertically (he had completed two rappels already); that he would not be able to negotiate less steep terrain; and that he would not be able to hike out. The party was still on the steep upper section of the climb and had about four more rappels to negotiate.

Montopoli queried Judkins about large ledges below him, and was told one was a short distance below. Montopoli told Judkins that once he and his partner reached that ledge, they should stay there and that rangers would probably remove him (and possibly the partner) from that ledge, at close to 11,000 feet. Judkins was instructed on how to prepare for the extraction.

At about 2:30 p.m., Montopoli initiated a rescue response. Grand Teton National Park rangers and the contract helicopter (26HX) with pilot C. Templeton were already at the Lupine Meadows Rescue Cache, having just completed training exercises. Dr. W. Smith, medical adviser, was informed of the situation and consulted several times during the course of the operation.

At about 3:14 p.m. the helicopter, with Rangers D. Jernigan and J. McConnell inside, departed Lupine Meadows on a recon mission to locate the climbing party. At 3:23 p.m. they located the climbers and returned to the Rescue Cache to configure for insertion and short-haul. After significant discussion at the Rescue Cache, the team decided to insert two rangers to the climbers' location on the ledge and remove them one at a time, accompanied by rangers. (The uninjured climber could not be left there alone and would have had to be accompanied by a ranger in an extremely dangerous descent if the decision to also extract him had not been made.)

Helicopter 26HX departed Lupine Meadows at 4:35 p.m. with McConnell spotting and Rangers N. Armitage and D. Jernigan suspended below the helicopter on a 150-foot rope in insertion mode. The rangers placed Judkins in a screamer suit and then extracted him, suspended below the helicopter on a 150-foot rope. Ranger Armitage accompanied him. They arrived at Lupine Meadows at about 5:07 p.m. Climbing partner Smith was then extracted. (Source: George Montopoli, Incident Commander.)

Analysis

There is no mention of whether Judkins tested the large hold before it came loose. (Source: Jed Williamson.)

Images

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