



AAC Publications

Stranded, Inadequate Equipment, Inexperience

Canada, British Columbia, Glacier National Park, Uto Peak

On July 6 about 6 a.m., a party of three left the parking lot to climb the southwest ridge of Uto Peak (2,927 meters). They had some difficulty with the steep snow on the approach to the Uto– Sir Donald col, due to very lightweight footwear, and two group members had limited experience, causing the party to take more time than anticipated on the climb. They reached the summit and began descending the northwest ridge late in the evening. They completed two rappels before being caught by darkness around 9:45 p.m. They soon stopped, planning to rest for several hours.

At about 3:30 a.m. the next morning, it began to rain and snow. Due to the slippery rock and the lack of footwear required for descending steep snow, they decided to rappel down the west face of Uto, rather than continue down the northwest ridge. They had completed several rappels from boulders before realizing they were entering progressively more challenging terrain. They decided to request a rescue.

At 8:14 a.m. on July 7, the group called 911 and the party eventually was transferred to Visitor Safety in Glacier National Park. The climbers reported they were uninjured but hypothermic and dehydrated. The weather at the time was cloudy with fog patches and rain in the valley and sleet above 2,100 meters. The Visitor Safety rescue team located the stranded climbers by air and slung onto a ledge five meters below them. The rescuers climbed up to the party and slung them off the face to the basin below.

Analysis

Better footwear would have sped up the approach on steep snow, allowed more time for climbing, and made the steep snow descent off the northwest ridge a possibility. Crampons may also have been useful as well. Some spare clothing, gloves, and an emergency tarp would have allowed them to spend the night in greater warmth and comfort. On longer alpine routes it is good to set a turnaround time and adhere to it if things take longer than expected.

Recognizing that they were not prepared for the situation they were in and calling for assistance was a very good group decision to prevent further complications. Many phones can call 911 if within range of a cell tower, even if they do not have service through the local provider. When calling 911, identify which national park you are in and ask to be connected directly to Parks Canada Emergency Dispatch to minimize the amount of time it takes for your call to reach the Visitor Safety team. Carrying a SPOT device or other emergency locator beacon is another good option, in case your phone does not work.

Images

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