



AAC Publications

Slip On Snow – Failure to Self-Arrest, No Helmet

California, Mt. Shasta, Avalanche Gulch / Heart Route

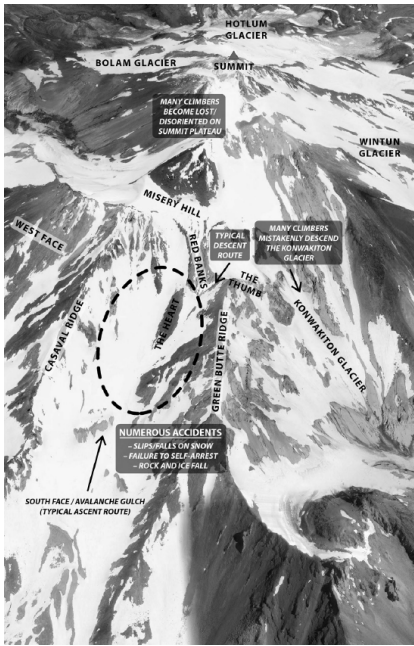
On May 25 a female climber (58) was ascending Avalanche Gulch via the Heart at roughly 12,000 feet, just below the Red Banks, when she fell and lost control of her ice axe. She was then unable to arrest her fall and was stopped/tackled by an independent climber after sliding to 11,400 feet, at climber's right of the Heart, near a well-trodden boot pack. A bystander called 911 at roughly 8:30 a.m., and the climbing rangers were dispatched thereafter.

Climbing rangers Nick Meyers and Brett Wagenheim were on the route and arrived on scene by 8:45 a.m. The climber complained of left ankle pain, had small lacerations and abrasions to her face and arms, and was not wearing a helmet. The climber was noticeably shivering and breathing rapidly. She was covered in an emergency bivouac for warmth, which helped reduce her breathing/ventilation rate. Icefall and rockfall continued to be a concern. The climber was able to bear weight on her left ankle and was assisted by short-rope on the descent to Helen Lake. The climber received further treatment of her abrasions at Helen Lake. She declined further assistance from rangers and self-rescued from Helen down to Bunny Flat with the assistance of her climbing party. (Source: Mt. Shasta Wilderness Climbing Ranger Report, prepared by Nick Meyers.)

ANALYSIS

Climbers should familiarize themselves with the proper techniques for ascending easy to moderate snow and ice, especially when climbing unroped. Practicing self-arrest techniques before a climb will lead to greater success in arresting a fall. "Know the Ropes" in Accidents 2014 covered essential snow climbing techniques. Search publications.americanalpineclub.org to find this helpful article. (Source: The Editors.)

Images



The majority of accidents occur on the south side of Mt. Shasta (shown here), in or near Avalanche Gulch. The hot spot for traumatic accidents is within the oval marked around the Heart. According to Mt. Shasta's accident statistics, the most common climbing accidents involve male climbers, 21–35 years of age, with little to no experience, slipping and falling on snow/ ice while descending, with resulting injuries of fractures or sprains. It's extremely common for climbers to get off-route and lost on the upper mountain. If climbing Mt. Shasta, prepare yourself by studying the layout of the mountain, practice snow climbing techniques, and know how to navigate in poor weather.

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