



AAC Publications

Slip on Snow – Inadequate Equipment, Exceeding Abilities

Wyoming, Disappointment Peak, Lake Ledges

Late in the day on June 29, a female climber (27) fell and sustained serious injuries while descending the Lake Ledges route on Disappointment Peak. [Editor's note: Lake Ledges is a 4th class route in midsummer and a moderate snow climb through spring and early summer.] **Her partner reported that after slipping on a snow slope she tumbled across several rocks and fell to the snow at the base of the climb. The climber was stable but with a possible broken leg.**

The initial plan was to locate the victim and, if conditions allowed, conduct a short-haul extraction. A backup plan was to lower the injured climber to a backcountry cache near Surprise Lake and spend the night with her, then fly her out the following morning. Two rangers boarded a helicopter and flew to the accident scene to conduct a size-up. At 8:10 p.m. the rangers reported that, due to high winds, they were unable to conduct a short-haul and were looking for a landing spot on the ridge above the climb. The winds also precluded a landing below the victim near Amphitheater Lake. Six rangers were flown to the ridge. They climbed down to the victim, evaluated her condition, and determined that she would need to be extricated that evening.

As the six rangers on scene began to lower the victim toward the Surprise Lake switchbacks, four other rangers gathered a wheeled litter and additional equipment. The victim was packaged and lowered by wheeled litter, through intermittent snow and steep trail, all the way to the Lupine Meadows trailhead. From there she was transferred to a waiting ambulance and taken to St. John's Hospital in Jackson.

This complex and physically demanding rescue involved 10 rangers and took almost 10 hours to conduct in darkness over rugged trail. Although the rescue took a toll on equipment, no injuries were reported.

ANALYSIS

The injured climber reported that she and her partner were descending snow when she lost her footing and fell. The victim, equipped with an ice axe and wearing a helmet, was unable to self-arrest as she slid on snow, bounced across a rock area, and dropped over a small cliff to the snow below. Her partner was below her and kicking steps to aid her descent when she fell. Neither climber was wearing crampons.

The climber admitted that her knowledge and experience of mountainous snow travel was very limited and she was climbing outside her abilities. Crampons and, more importantly, knowledge and experience of steep snow travel may have prevented this accident. (Source: Chris Harder, Incident Commander.)

Images

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