



AAC Publications

Fall on Snow – Loss of Control While Glissading

Wyoming, Grand Teton National Park, Middle Teton

At approximately 4:30 a.m. on July 25, Climber 1 and Climber 2 (both age 25) departed the Lupine Meadows Trailhead with plans to climb the Dike Route on the Middle Teton. At approximately 4 p.m. they reached the top of the Dike Pinnacle and decided, due to the time of day, not to continue to the summit.

They chose to descend to the South Fork of Garnet Canyon via the Southeast Couloir. After descending a few hundred feet, they encountered a snowpatch, which they decided to glissade. They were wearing helmets and had ice axes, and they both used a sitting glissading technique.

Climber 1 went first and glissaded out of Climber 2's view. Climber 2 didn't hear or see anything that indicated anything was amiss. Climber 2 then lost control during her glissade and slid approximately 100 to 200 feet before stopping at the bottom edge of the snowpatch. During the fall, she impacted a few rocks protruding from the snow and sustained minor injuries.

Climber 2 saw that Climber 1 had also slid out of control and tumbled off the snow and over rocky slabs, before stopping on a sloping grassy ledge. Climber 1 had slid and fell an estimated 200 feet. He was conscious but bleeding from wounds to his head. At approximately 5:20 p.m., Climber 2 used her cell phone to call for help.

Rangers were flown to an unimproved landing spot at about 11,200 feet, near the Ellingwood Couloir on the south side of the Middle Teton, and dropped off at approximately 7:25 p.m. The rangers scrambled over rocky terrain to reach the injured climbers 20 minutes later. After an assessment of both patients' condition, the technical nature of the terrain, and the time of day, the rescue team decided helicopter short-haul extraction of the two patients and the three rescuers would be the preferred method of rescue.

At approximately 8:40 p.m., Climber 1, with one ranger attending, was extracted from the grassy ledge. Climber 2 and two attending rangers were flown from the grassy ledge soon afterward and arrived at Lupine Meadows shortly after sunset.

ANALYSIS

In a telephone interview with a ranger the next day, Climber 2 said they should have avoided the snow and climbed down the adjacent rock slabs. Before committing to any glissade, it's prudent to test the snow surface in an area with no consequences in case of a slip. Be sure you know or can see the runout zone before glissading. Control your speed continuously with boot heels and ice axe, and don't hesitate to self-arrest aggressively if your speed grows too great. (Source: National Park Service Search and Rescue Report and the Editors.)

Images



The Middle Teton (12,805 feet), with the Black Dike prominent in center and the South Fork of Garnet Canyon to the left.

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