



## AAC Publications

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### **Failure to Follow Route – Inadequate Equipment, Inexperience**

California, Mt. Shasta, Avalanche Gulch

**On Saturday, December 5, Chris Carr (owner, Shasta Mountain Guides) and Eric Rideout (friend) reported to rangers at Bunny Flat that they had encountered a man in his 20s who looked unprepared, at approximately 8,300 feet, near Spring Hill.** The encounter occurred around 8 a.m., and the climber was heading for the summit. The climber had only a very small rucksack, no snowshoes or skis, and no bivy gear, but did have decent-looking older ski clothing, plastic mountaineering boots, ice axe, and crampons. Recent new snow had created severe post-holing conditions, ankle- to knee-deep, with hip-deep snow in isolated areas. Carr and Rideout told the climber that a summit bid was unrealistic given the time of day, approaching winter storm, the climber's lack of proper equipment, and the route's winter snow and avalanche conditions. Additional snow was beginning to fall as they spoke.

The climber failed to return to Bunny Flat before nightfall, and he was reported missing by his climbing partner, who had turned back early in their ascent. On December 6, at approximately 4 a.m., Siskiyou County SAR notified rangers of the missing climber. County SAR coordinator Ryan Welch had initiated a cell-phone ping, identifying the climber's location near Horse Camp. Often, climbers are funneled into Cascade Gulch when attempting to descend the Avalanche Gulch route in poor visibility conditions. From Horse Camp, which lies at the bottom end of Avalanche Gulch, near tree line, a short veer to the right will take one down into Cascade Gulch. Following Cascade Gulch, climbers would arrive at the McBride Springs Campground, four miles up the Everitt Memorial Highway.

A rescue plan was formed for rangers Nick Meyers and Jonathan Dove to ski-tour up from Bunny Flat to search for the lost climber's tracks in the Horse Camp vicinity. Meanwhile, Siskiyou County SAR Team 1 headed into the Cascade Gulch area via Sand Flat to make an effort to cross his tracks in that area. SAR Team 2 began driving up the McBride Springs road via snowcat, also in an effort to locate tracks and/or the climber. The idea was to place teams at the upper, middle, and lower areas of Cascade Gulch and attempt to bisect his tracks in the new snow.

Meyers also placed a quick call to Chris Carr, who was not skiing that morning but lives close to the mountain and decided to head up and assist in locating the climber. Carr, just ahead of rangers, managed to find a single set of tracks approximately 100 meters to the northwest of the Sierra Club Hut (Horse Camp), near tree line. It was assumed that this was the missing climber, as nobody else was on the mountain. Carr followed the climber's boot pack down into Cascade Gulch and located the individual. He called Meyers via cell phone, and Meyers and Dove were easily able to locate Carr's tracks and follow them to his location. All three rescuers were able to assist the climber in walking down Cascade Gulch to the McBride Springs road. The individual had no injuries and did not possess a valid summit pass or wilderness permit.

### **ANALYSIS**

The climber spent over 24 hours out in a winter storm, with only the clothes on his back, in unfamiliar terrain, with the hazards of avalanches, severe wind, and cold. Respectfully, both Meyers and Carr told him he "used one of his nine lives that day." When the climber appeared unmoved, describing his experience as "fun and interesting," Meyers sternly recommended that the climber think about all the lives that were endangered to rescue him and that he should prepare properly for such an adventure next time. (Source: Mt. Shasta Wilderness Climbing Ranger Report 2015.)

## Images

## Article Details

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