



## AAC Publications

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### **Fall on Snow – Failure to Self Arrest**

Oregon, Mt. Hood, South Side

**While descending the Mazama Chute on January 31, a roped team of two (ages 39 and 43) fell and suffered ankle and lower leg fractures.** It is believed the upper climber lost her footing during a rest break and slid toward the lower climber. Rather than firmly anchoring himself to brace for the fall, the lower climber attempted to grab the falling partner. Neither climber was able to arrest, and the slide ended about 500 feet lower in the Hot Rocks area. The accident was witnessed by Portland Mountain Rescue personnel training nearby. The subjects were treated and evacuated to a lower part of the glacier, where they were picked up by an Army National Guard helicopter.

### **ANALYSIS**

On the 50° snow slope where the slide initiated, climbers must be proficient at ice axe self-arrest and roped team arrest. An unarrested fall of 10 to 20 feet develops too much energy to be stopped by tackling. The lower climber would have had more success if he had immediately fallen into the self-arrest position and let the rope catch the falling partner. This climb and descent are normally done without belays or protection. An unarrested roped fall may pull off multiple climbers and/or entangle other teams on this busy climb. (Source: Jeff Scheetz, Portland Mountain Rescue.)

Editor's note: On the same day, also in the Mazama Chute, a 29-year-old solo climber fell approximately 450 feet, ending his slide in a fumarole, when a crampon malfunction prompted him to stop his descent and then slip. He was unable to self-arrest. Portland Mountain Rescue personnel observed the fall and pulled him from the fumarole 26 minutes later. The climber had only minor injuries and was lucky the fumarole gases were non-lethal.

## Images



The Mazama Chute area near the top of Mt. Hood's South Side Route, with a rescue team attending to climbers who have fallen. Some of the rescuers have formed a "human wall" to guard the responders and patients against small falling rocks and ice.



Rescuers work to extract a climber who slid 450 feet and dropped into a fumarole after a crampon malfunction.

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