



AAC Publications

Rockfall

Wyoming, Middle Teton, Dike Route

At around 8:30 a.m. on July 7, Pete Mumford, a past Grand Teton seasonal employee, heard rockfall and a subsequent call for help. He quickly made his way to the base of the Middle Teton, near the Black Dike, where he found Climber 2 tending to her husband, Climber 1, who had a broken left humerus and severe lacerations. The two applied a tourniquet to control the bleeding. Mumford called for assistance at 9 a.m., and then helped the climbers move about 200 feet to get out of the rockfall hazard area.

Rangers were flown to a landing area below the accident site and quickly hiked up to the scene, arriving at 10:23 a.m. The team assessed the patient's vitals and injuries, administered pain medications, and applied an extremity vacuum splint and a C-A-T (combat application tourniquet) for uncontrolled bleeding. The patient was assisted in walking down to the helispot and transported to the hospital by helicopter and ambulance.

ANALYSIS

Climber 2 reported that she was belaying her husband up the initial pitch of the Dike Route when the accident happened. He was approximately 30 to 35 meters up the climb when a boulder estimated to be the size of five or six microwave ovens fell down the route and hit him. Despite his arm injury, Climber 1 was able to build an anchor with his uninjured arm, allowing the belayer to lower him to her location. Climber 2 was not hit by any of the debris.

This was a natural rockfall. Recent thunderstorms and rain showers may have loosened the matrix holding the rock in place, but it's unlikely the climbers could have foreseen the event. Both climbers (ages 27 and 29) were experienced, and they skillfully handled their initial self-rescue. (Sources: 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. NPS Photo

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