



AAC Publications

Fall on Snow – Painful Self-Rescue

California, Mt. Shasta, Avalanche Gulch

On July 25 at approximately 2:45 p.m., Bryan Bridgefs slipped and fell below Red Banks on the south side of Mt. Shasta. From his location at about 12,000 feet, Bridgefs called 911. Mike Burns from Siskiyou County Search and Rescue called climbing ranger Matt Dooley at 3:15 p.m. to explain the situation. He said Bridgefs had complained of arm pain and had reported that he was unable to move.

At approximately 4:15 p.m., a California Highway Patrol (CHP) helicopter began flying over the area. CHP soon located the injured Bridgefs, but due to warm temperatures limiting the helicopter's capabilities at higher elevations, they were unable to reach his location and pick him up. The helicopter landed in the Bunny Flat parking lot, and the pilot, Burns, and Dooley discussed their options. It would take a minimum of two hours to hike to the patient's location from Helen Lake. Twelve- to 18-inch-deep sun cups in the snow would limit the effectiveness of a lowering the climber in a sked (rescue stretcher), and the risk of rockfall to rescuers and the climber would be greater during the afternoon and evening. The CHP helicopter might be unable to reach Bridgefs before darkness. However, the helicopter would be able to make an extraction attempt early the next morning, if needed.

At approximately 4:45 p.m., Dooley and Burns consulted with Bridgefs by phone. Bridgefs was informed of the difficulties preventing a rescue that day and advised to do his best to keep descending on his own, despite pain that he reported was preventing him from taking more than a few steps at a time. His brother, Robert, would accompany him. The rescuers made plans for a morning mission if the patient was unable to self-rescue during the night.

At about 10 p.m., the injured Bridgefs arrived at Helen Lake and called Burns, who advised him to keep descending if he could. The patient reached the road at approximately 3 a.m. and soon checked in at Mercy Medical Center.

ANALYSIS

This incident is documented mainly to highlight the fact that self-rescue sometimes may be the only option after an accident. Poor weather, darkness, and other factors may prevent a rescue team from reaching a patient. As a result, climbers on Shasta and other mountains must be prepared either to wait through the night for help to arrive (having carried appropriate clothing, shelter, food, water, first-aid and painkillers) or else be equipped and mentally prepared to self-evacuate. (Sources: Mt. Shasta and Castle Crags Wilderness Climbing Ranger Report 2016 and the Editors.)

Images

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