



AAC Publications

Benighted and Stranded

New Hampshire, White Mountain National Forest, Cannon Cliff

On November 19, two men in their 20s started up a long climb in the Vertigo area. The pair had a single rope and adequate clothing for a full day out. After the first four or five pitches of most routes in this area of Cannon, the climbing tends to peter into brushy ledges punctuated by short slabs, and route-finding can become difficult. By nighttime the pair was still climbing. Both climbers felt that retreat wasn't an option. Late at night, about 200 feet from the top of the cliff, the climbers called Fish and Game to request a rescue. Six members of Mountain Rescue Service hiked up the backside of Cannon and set up a haul system, which they used to pull up the stranded climbers. They all reached the road by midmorning.

ANALYSIS

This scenario is not uncommon on Cannon. The upper sections of the cliff are loose and route-finding is difficult. Carrying a tagline to expedite retreats is a good idea, but it's also possible to rappel the first half of many routes with a single 70-meter rope—most pitches are short, having been climbed mainly in the 1970s, and many safe fixed anchors exist. By the time the rescue team arrived, rain and high wind had moved in. In late November, with short days and very cold nights, good judgment becomes even more important on long routes like this. Bailing off a climb can be more daunting than finishing, but keeping this avenue open is an important part of any climbing day. (Source Michael Wejchert, Mountain Rescue Service.)

Images

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