



## AAC Publications

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### **Strandings on Rainier – Weather, Altitude Sickness**

Washington, Mt. Rainier, Disappointment Cleaver and Emmons Glacier

**In the first three weeks of the summer season on Rainier, rangers performed three helicopter rescues. The first was on June 10, after two climbers spent several unplanned nights on the summit after becoming disoriented.**

The second rescue was June 19, two days after a pair of climbers summited via the Disappointment Cleaver route but were caught in a storm as they descended. They dug a snow cave just below the crater rim, at 14,300 feet, and activated a SPOT locator beacon twice on June 17. Search crews were unable to reach them until June 19, due to severe conditions, so they spent two nights in single-digit temperatures. Both climbers were in stable condition when rescued.

Just before midnight on June 27, a team left Camp Schurman at 9,450 feet to attempt the summit via the Emmons Glacier route. A 23-year-old climber reported feeling ill before they reached the top, so they descended to 11,500 feet. The climber was having trouble breathing and couldn't continue descending, so one person remained with the ill climber while the rest of the team went down to Camp Schurman to call for help on a park service emergency radio. That same day, a helicopter dropped rangers onto a ledge several hundred feet below the stranded climbers and they climbed up to the pair. The climbers were extracted by short haul to a landing zone, flown to the base of the mountain, and the patient was transferred to an ambulance for a trip to the hospital to be checked out. (Source: Mt. Rainier National Park.)

### **ANALYSIS**

Such incidents demonstrate how important it is to carry the necessary equipment and clothing to survive several unplanned nights high on the mountain, including a tent or shovel for building an emergency snow cave and a stove to melt snow for water. A personal locator beacon is the surest way to call for help; a system that allows two-way communication can greatly facilitate rescue efforts. Finally, in the case of altitude illness, descent is the best treatment; an early decision to turn around when a climber shows signs of acute mountain sickness can avoid more serious illness and/or the need for rescue. (Source: The Editors.)

## Images



Location of stranded climbers on the Emmons Glacier route.

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