



AAC Publications

Exposure, Hypothermia

Washington, Mt. Rainier, Gibraltar Ledges

About 10 p.m. on March 26, people at Camp Muir notified rangers that two climbers had not returned from their summit bid and their gear was still in the shelter. At 9:30 a.m., Monique Richard, 41, could be heard yelling for help above Camp Muir.

After she was helped down to camp, she said that she and her partner, Arvid Lahti, 58, had been caught in a storm while descending. They sought shelter below a ridge near Gibraltar Ledges, but Lahti succumbed overnight from hypothermia. The storm had included wind gusts estimated to 83 mph and temperatures near 0°F. Richard also suffered from hypothermia but survived. Rescuers found Lahti's body at about 10,600 feet, 400 vertical feet above Camp Muir.

ANALYSIS

Lahti and Richard were both experienced climbers who had completed multiple high-altitude peaks. (Lahti was a well-known Norwegian mountaineer.) As visitors to the area, they may have been on a tight time schedule. However, they should have paid closer attention to the weather forecast, which called for a significant winter storm to start during the afternoon of their climb. They may not have seen this forecast, or perhaps the reasonably good weather at Camp Muir on the morning of their ascent prompted them to attempt a rapid climb and descent, before the storm arrived. It's also possible their background led them to underestimate a winter climb of Rainier, which requires good conditions, stable weather, and the clothing and equipment to survive an unexpected storm or delay. (Sources: Mt. Rainier National Park, media accounts, and the Editors.)

OTHER WASHINGTON INCIDENTS: Complete reports were not received for several other serious accidents in Washington state in 2016, including a solo climber who died after a long fall on Mt. Adams and a woman who fell while climbing in Icicle Creek Canyon. These incidents and others are included in our data tables for the year.

Images

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