



## AAC Publications

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### **Stranded – Inexperience, Off Route**

Wyoming, Grand Teton, Exum Ridge

**Climber 1 (24-year-old male) and Climber 2 (27-year-old female) each had been climbing for about two years. They had limited alpine experience, and this was their first climb together.** On July 3 they went to Jenny Lake Ranger Station for information. Their initial plan had been to climb the North Ridge of the Grand Teton, but after talking to rangers in the station they decided to attempt the complete Exum Ridge in a day.

The two left Lupine Meadows trailhead the next morning at 2 a.m. and were starting the Lower Exum Ridge at 8 a.m. After two pitches they felt like they were moving slower than expected but decided to continue. Late in the day, they were confused about their location; they were unaware that they had completed the last pitch of the Lower Exum and continued up past Wall Street on the upper ridge. (The color of the rock was dark, and they thought they were still on the Black Face, near the top of the Lower Exum.) At dusk they were off route and doing difficult climbing above the Wind Tunnel of the Upper Exum. They rappelled back down to the top of the Golden Staircase (just above Wallstreet) in the dark and made the call for assistance.

At 10:30 p.m. rangers received a report of two climbers who were uninjured but stuck, cold, and lost. They reported their location as the Lower Exum Ridge. Rangers Harder and Hardesty were stationed at the Lower Saddle and made multiple attempts to locate the headlamps of the stranded climbers. At 1 a.m., having failed to locate their position, rangers advised the distressed climbers to stay where they were and not attempt to rappel in the dark.

At 4:58 a.m., Harder and Hardesty saw the headlamps of the climbers on the Upper Exum Ridge and confirmed contact with multiple light flashes. Harder and Hardesty, along with one bystander and two Exum guides, traveled to the top of the Golden Staircase and reached the stranded climbers at 7:45 a.m., then assisted them back to the Lower Saddle. (Source: National Park Service Search and Rescue Report.)

### **ANALYSIS**

Route-finding often is difficult in the Tetons, where complex terrain and face climbing along indistinct features is the norm. With more experience on alpine rock, especially within a given mountain range, climbers develop a better sense of how to follow a route description. These climbers would have been better off choosing a shorter route for their first climb together in the Tetons. This incident also reinforces the importance of carrying adequate clothing, food, water, and possibly emergency shelter for an unexpected night out. (Source: The Editors.)

## Images



Nez Perce (11,901 feet) in the Tetons. The south ridge is prominent in center left.

## Article Details

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