



## AAC Publications

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### **Leader Fall and Lost Gear Lead to Stranding**

Wyoming, Grand Teton, Petzoldt Ridge

**On August 9, at approximately 4:15 p.m., ranger Schuster received a transferred cell phone call from a climbing party on the Lower Exum Ridge of the Grand Teton.** The caller stated that he was in visual and voice contact with two climbers on the Petzoldt Ridge, one of whom had taken a 25-foot fall but was not injured. The Petzoldt climbers indicated they had lost their climbing rack and did not have the ability to rappel off the ridge or climb any more technical rock.

At 5:55 p.m., helicopter 38HX with pilot Wilson and rangers Bellino and Armitage departed Lupine Meadows Rescue Cache and performed a reconnaissance flight. Ranger Armitage was successfully inserted to the stranded climbers' location. He prepared the climbers for a short-haul extraction, and the pair was flown directly to Lupine Meadows, arriving at 7:15 p.m.

#### **ANALYSIS**

The stranded climbers, both age 20, were interviewed at the Rescue Cache. Climber 1 had approximately four years of alpine climbing experience, including climbs in Alaska, Peru, and the Alps. However, he did not have any significant alpine rock experience; he stated that he had completed traditional rock climbs up to 5.9. Climber 2 only had 1.5 years of experience that was limited to gym and sport routes. They were carrying a single 60-meter rope, four camming devices, one set of nuts, four hexes, and eight runners. Neither had climbed in the Teton Range before.

The rescued climbers had departed their camp at the Moraine at 3:45 a.m. and were at the base of the route at 6 a.m. They reached the base of the "Window Pitch," about halfway up the route, around noon. Here, they had trouble with route-finding and spent the next four hours trying to determine the correct line. By this point both climbers were exhausted and were experiencing symptoms of extreme dehydration and fatigue, including cramping in their fingers and lightheadedness. Attempting the next pitch, Climber 1 took a 25-foot leader fall, which did not injure him but separated him from all of his wired nuts, equating to half of the team's rock protection. Climber 2 lowered him to a large ledge on the north side of the Petzoldt Ridge, and the two yelled for help.

The climbers acknowledged they had severely underestimated the physical strength and endurance required by the route. It is important to choose routes that are well within your ability, especially in a location that is unfamiliar. These climbers also packed a fairly light rack for this climb, giving them few options in case of lost gear or the need to retreat. (Sources: National Park Service Search and Rescue Report and the Editors.)

## Images

## Article Details

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