



AAC Publications

Stranded – Cited for Creating Hazard

Wyoming, Mt. Moran, Falling Ice Glacier

On August 11, at approximately 4 p.m., a woman went to the Lupine Meadows Rescue Cache to report that her friend, a 30-year-old male, was stuck on Mt. Moran and needed help. They had had been communicating by two-way family radio. With the use of the radio, it was confirmed that he was on the Falling Ice Glacier on Mt. Moran and unable to descend.

Based on the stranded climber's location, lateness of the day, availability of the park contract helicopter, and the fact that a ground-based rescue would put rangers into an area known to have considerable rockfall and icefall hazard, it was determined that a helicopter evacuation would be the safest form of rescue. At 5:45 p.m., helicopter 38HX left Lupine Meadows with rangers Bellino and Jernigan aboard. The helicopter landed directly on the glacier, near the stranded climber's location, and the rangers helped the climber onboard the aircraft along with his pack for the flight back to Lupine Meadows.

ANALYSIS

Rangers interviewed the rescued individual in an effort to find out why he was in a position to need a rescue. He stated that he had acquired his information about climbing Mt. Moran from Summit Post, an online mountaineering resource. He did not consult any of the local publications nor stop at the Jenny Lake Ranger Station to acquire current route information. He was equipped with mountaineering boots, ice axe, crampons, harness, belay device, five meters of small-diameter rope, several carabiners, and camping equipment. He left the Leigh Lake Trailhead around 6 a.m. on Tuesday morning, August 10, hiked around the south shore of Leigh Lake, and bush-whacked toward the mouth of Leigh Canyon and then up the Falling Ice drainage to the base of the glacier. Here, he decided to follow rock on the right (north) side of the glacier and avoid the main ice face. Once on the top of the glacier, he set up camp. He did not have a backcountry permit for camping.

Early Wednesday morning, the climber ascended a 300-foot, near-vertical rock face with much loose rock toward the notch between the CMC Route and the Drizzlepuss gendarme. Partway through this ascent, he decided the route he had chosen was too difficult and hazardous, so he climbed back down to the glacier. Unable to find a way to continue his descent off the glacier, he called his friend via radio for help.

Other than conveying that he was attempting to climb Mt. Moran, the individual was unable to provide the name of any known route that he was attempting. Other than the CMC route, none of the climbs on Moran that are described on Summit Post ascend anywhere near the Falling Ice Glacier, and the description of the CMC Route does not advocate climbing anywhere near the area this person was located. Had he talked to the Jenny Lake ranger staff, they would have strongly discouraged him from solo climbing Mt. Moran via the Falling Ice Glacier. With one ice axe, crampons, and boots, the rescued individual was equipped to climb steep snow, but he did not have a partner nor any rock climbing protection, making the rope he carried completely useless for fall protection. With only five meters of rope, it also was nearly useless for descending, even if he had found an adequate anchor to rappel from.

The Falling Ice Glacier is situated in a narrow hanging canyon, and there is little margin for error when entering this area via helicopter. The landing zone is crevassed and located in the rockfall zone of the

Black Rock face of Mt. Moran. Based on this climber's inadequate preparation, equipment, skills, and self-reliance, as well as a disregard for others' well-being, the rescued individual received a citation for disorderly conduct—creating or maintaining a hazardous condition. (Source: National Park Service Search and Rescue Report.)

EDITOR'S NOTE: Rangers in Grand Teton National Park, as with most other SAR teams in the United States, do not bill people for the cost of the rescues they perform. However, Grand Teton and other jurisdictions occasionally have issued citations when they feel a climber's egregious lack of preparation has created a hazardous situation for rescuers or others.

Images

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