



## AAC Publications

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### **Mt. Shasta Annual Summary**

California, Mt. Shasta and Castle Crags Wilderness

**In 2017 there were four climbing-related incidents on Mt. Shasta.** One accident was the result of rockfall, while the other three were primarily due to poor preparation for the terrain and environment.

On April 23, a party of three male climbers attempted to summit Shasta via the Avalanche Gulch route but turned back at the top of Red Banks. They descended to Horse Camp together, arriving safely in the afternoon. As they continued down toward Bunny Flat, one member (age 29) began to fall behind. The others told him to follow their tracks, but he ended up spending the night out with little gear (a very light pack, a lightweight puffy jacket, and snow pants). The climber was found on the morning of the 24th by another party and assisted down. He was uninjured.

This incident easily could have been avoided with proper preparation and better communication and teamwork; a map and compass and knowledge of how to use them would have gotten the lost climber to the trailhead. It is to be noted that the three climbers had just recently met on Facebook and were not regular climbing partners.

A 24-year old female climber sustained frostbite on May 14 during an attempt on the Avalanche Gulch route. The climber's boots had become wet during two days of snow camping and skills practice, and remained so during the summit attempt. After climbing for three hours in very cold temperatures (-10°F at 1 a.m.) and six or seven inches of fresh snow, the climber reported that she had no feeling in either of her feet. Realizing that she was at risk for cold injury, the party descended from 11,200 feet and sought medical care. She was diagnosed with mild frostbite to toes on both feet.

Prevention of frostbite injuries begins with dry and non-constrictive gear. Proper-fitting clothing that is layered will help to prevent overheating and sweating. Wet socks, gloves, and other clothing should be changed as soon as practical. Cold or numb extremities should be rewarmed through skin-to-skin contact. (Rewarming of frostbitten tissue in the field should only be done if there is no possibility of the injured site refreezing.)

On July 2, U.S. Forest Service climbing rangers, in conjunction with two local guides and a California Highway Patrol (CHP) helicopter, rescued an injured male climber in Avalanche Gulch below the Red Banks. The climber (male, mid-30s) was struck on the back of the head by rockfall that precipitated a 100-foot fall down the slope. He was found unconscious. The climber was stabilized and, after a hoist rescue, transported to Mercy Medical Center at Mt. Shasta.

On July 26, a 36-year-old female climber attempted to climb Shasta via the Clear Creek route. She and her partner got a late start and were inadequately prepared, both in knowledge and equipment, for a summit bid. After separating from her partner, who returned to their camp lower on the mountain, the climber continued to approximately 13,000 feet. At 10:39 p.m. she called 911 and requested assistance. As she was uninjured and rescuers would take a minimum of eight hours to reach her, she was instructed to find a safe location and to shelter in place until the morning.

The following day, Forest Service climbing rangers met the partner at the two women's campsite and pinged the missing climber's cell phone in an attempt to obtain her location. The climber's partner informed the rangers that the missing climber was dressed only in a neon green dress, light hiking

boots, and a small pink windbreaker.

A full search and rescue operation was conducted throughout July 27 and 28 and included air assets from the National Guard and members of the Marin County, Contra Costa County, Josephine County, Jackson County, Bay Area Mountain Rescue, and Shasta County SAR teams. This search continued until the evening of July 28, when a 911 call was received from a different party who had found the missing climber. She was uninjured and escorted from the mountain.

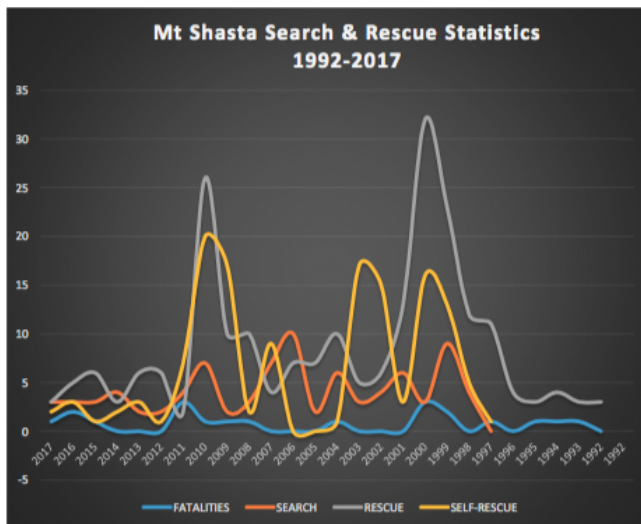
**Two incidents on Mt. Shasta in 2017 involved knee injuries to skiers, one of whom slid 100 to 200 feet after falling on icy, sun-cupped snow in Avalanche Gulch.** (Source: Mt. Shasta and Castle Crags Wilderness 2017 Climbing Ranger Report.)

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** There were nine searches and rescues of all types on Shasta (including self-rescues)—the fifth year in a row of relatively few incidents compared with the average of the previous 15 years. (A total of 6,817 summit passes were sold for Shasta in 2017, just above the 20-year average.) Nick Meyers, lead climbing ranger and director of the Mt. Shasta Avalanche Center, attributes this trend in part to good luck with climbing conditions and weather, but also to a sustained campaign of climber education, both on and off the mountain. Rangers offer clinics on climbing Shasta at California REI stores, and Meyers said far more climbers are checking recent conditions online ([Shastaavalanche.org](http://Shastaavalanche.org)) before their attempts. During face-to-face contacts, the four climbing rangers “hammer the basics”: 1) Ice axe use and quick and proper self-arrest, 2) Proper glissade technique, 3) Consequences of climbing into a whiteout, and 4) Dangers of party separation.

## Images



Mt. Shasta rangers at the Helen Lake base camp.



Accident data from Mt. Shasta, showing a recent trend of fewer accidents than the long-term average.



Shastina and penitentes at sunset.

## Article Details

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