



AAC Publications

Stranded – Failure to Rappel, Inexperience

California, Yosemite Valley, Royal Arches

On March 3, at 8:24 p.m., two male climbers (both in their early 20s) reported they were stranded partway up the Royal Arches route (approximately 15 pitches, 5.7 C0). The climbers had moved slower than expected, and, with a storm approaching, they decided to rappel the route with a single rope after the pendulum traverse on pitch 10. After two rappels, the climbers found themselves without fixed rappel anchors and were unable to continue.

Cold and tired, and with bad weather moving in fast, they decided to call YOSAR. They were instructed to stay put and continually exercise to stay warm. (The climbers had food, water, and jackets.) By the time the SAR team had mobilized, rain had begun falling in earnest and it became unsafe for them to conduct a rescue that night. Once the storm cleared, two SAR team members climbed to the stranded climbers, reaching them at 11 a.m., and rappelled with them to the ground.

ANALYSIS

There are abundant opportunities for building gear rappel anchors on and around the Royal Arches route. Be willing to leave equipment for anchors when making unplanned rappels. Bringing two ropes on a long climb will decrease the number of rappels necessary in a retreat and increases your chances of finding fixed anchors or anchor-building opportunities. It's also important to have the equipment and knowledge to reascend rappel ropes and choose an alternate rappel route if the first one leads to a dead-end.

These climbers headed up a long route with a storm in the forecast. They were lucky the storm wasn't colder or more prolonged, as a Sierra storm in March can quickly cause hypothermia. (Source: Yosemite National Park Climbing Rangers.)

Images



Approximate line of the Royal Arches Route, showing (1) the start of the standard rappel route and (2) the rappel route attempted by the stranded climbers.

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