



AAC Publications

Rockfall on Approach

Wyoming, Grand Teton National Park, Garnet Canyon

On the morning of August 26, rangers received a call from a woman saying that one of her climbing partners was trapped under large boulders that had rolled over her in the Lower South Fork of Garnet Canyon. The party of three had been avoiding snow on the second rise of the canyon, at approximately 10,100 feet, when the reporting party knocked down loose rocks that struck her partner (female, age 24), who was 40 feet below. The climbers had removed one boulder from the patient's chest, but her legs were trapped by another large rock. She had a bleeding head injury and difficulty breathing.

Rangers responded by helicopter, removed the boulder (estimated at 100 pounds and 14 inches in diameter), and freed the patient. The patient was short-hauled from the scene. (Source: National Park Service Search and Rescue Report.)

ANALYSIS

Although this was not a climbing accident, per se, the hazards of loose talus and rock-filled ledges are encountered in many climbing environments. All members of a party should take great care to avoid knocking off loose rocks or starting slides and immediately yell "Rock!" if something does fall. If possible, travel on a diagonal path so one climber is not directly beneath the other. It's usually best to stay close together on open slopes—for better communication and to avoid rockfall before it gains dangerous and unpredictable momentum—but move one at a time through gullies or other constricted areas.

Finally, consider donning your helmet for approaches through steep talus or scree and leaving it on for the full descent. You have to carry it anyway—it might as well be doing some good. (Source: The Editors.)

Images

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