



AAC Publications

Mt. Shasta Annual Summary

California, Mt. Shasta and Castle Crags Wilderness

In 2018 there were eight climbing-related accidents on Mt. Shasta. Four were due to falls on ice or snow, two were due to rockfall, and one was the result of glissading with crampons; little information is available about the eighth incident. In addition, there were numerous searches involving lost climbers (see note below). Despite a total of 20 search and rescue incidents on the mountain—well above the recent annual average—there were no fatalities in 2018.

On May 12, a female climber, age 32, fell and slid a reported 1,000 feet in Avalanche Gulch after lunging for a dropped cell phone to prevent it from sliding down the steep, firm slope. She suffered a fractured ankle and multiple scrapes and bruises. She was wearing crampons and had an ice axe. Gale-force winds and strong downdrafts on the mountain prevented a helicopter rescue, so rangers and volunteers brought her down Avalanche Gulch in a toboggan, a process taking many hours. This incident could have been easily prevented by focusing on the task at hand rather than multi-tasking in terrain with fall potential.

On May 14, a 65-year-old male climber was struck in the head by rockfall while descending Avalanche Gulch near the Heart. He had been wearing a helmet, but had taken it off to adjust the headband or liner when he was hit. The climber momentarily lost consciousness but was able to self-rescue. He suffered a two-inch scalp laceration to the back of his head.

An 18-year-old male attempted to glissade down the Avalanche Gulch on June 18 while wearing crampons. Near the Heart, his crampons stuck in the snow and he suffered a broken ankle. Rangers continually attempt to educate climbers regarding proper glissade technique—including never glissading with crampons—but each year this type of accident still occurs.

On June 23, a male climber (age unknown) fell an unknown distance in Avalanche Gulch. The climber was able to self-rescue with the help of his partners. He sustained major abrasions to his buttocks and back. A second accident on June 23 occurred on the west face. A novice male climber (mid-30s) fell approximately 1,500 feet after a slip while off-route; he attempted to self-arrest but lost control of his axe. His fall was witnessed by a Shasta Mountain Guides employee, who assisted the climber after the fall. The climber suffered a broken heel, a broken small toe, a sprained ankle, and an unspecified knee injury.

A 29-year-old male climber was climbing the Avalanche Gulch route early on the morning of June 30 when a large rock came tumbling over the Red Banks and struck the climber in the ankle, resulting in a short fall. The climber was unable to walk, and his ankle was slightly angulated, indicating a likely ankle fracture. His partners and other climbers improvised a litter with a closed-cell foam sleeping pad and various pieces of webbing and were able to self-rescue, dragging the injured climber down to Helen Lake. He was then loaded onboard an Army National Guard helicopter and transferred to a local medical facility.

On July 1, a 49-year-old male climber slipped while downclimbing through Red Banks. He fell approximately 200 feet and sustained facial lacerations and abrasions but no other significant injuries. He was able to continue his descent, along with his climbing partners, without issue. At the end of July, a female climber broke her leg at approximately 11,500 feet. Additional information is unknown, but it is presumed she fell.

ANALYSIS

Search and rescue incidents nearly doubled from the year before. That said, conditions on Shasta were never abnormally dangerous. Most incidents on the mountain involve either slips and falls on steep snow and failing to self-arrest or climbers getting lost. Learning to self-arrest and knowing how to navigate are essential skills for wilderness and mountaineering, not just on Shasta but anywhere in the world.

The rangers often talk about “mountain sense” to climbers. This is a hard topic to teach, but mountain sense involves making good decisions based on your personal and/or group knowledge, skills, and abilities. It’s listening to that little voice in your head and forcing “summit fever” to the side when the conditions, weather, visibility, or the group’s fitness and readiness aren’t optimal. (Source: Mt. Shasta and Castle Crags Wilderness 2018 Climbing Ranger Report.)

LOST CLIMBERS ON SHASTA: In addition to the incidents described above, there were seven cases in 2018 involving lost climbers. Climbers most often get off-route on the upper mountain, above around 12,500 feet. Avoid climbing into a whiteout or clouds, especially when unfamiliar with the terrain. Most climbers could avoid becoming lost with basic navigation tools and situational awareness, but too few climbers carry dedicated navigation tools of any sort. Smartphone mapping applications can work very well; a simple recommendation is to learn to use one of these apps and how to use your phone to provide lat/long coordinates to rescue personnel. An extra charge stick (battery) for your phone is a great idea too.

In 2018, there were three false alarms or accidental activations of Satellite Emergency Notification Devices (SEND devices), such as the Garmin inReach and SPOT Messenger. It is essential for climbers to secure these devices to prevent false alarms, which waste valuable resources that may be needed for actual emergencies. (Source: Mt. Shasta and Castle Crags Wilderness 2018 Climbing Ranger Report.)

Images



In the low-snow season on Shasta, long carries of injured climbers may require a dozen or more rescue personnel.



Examples of route-finding information marked on climber's photos by rangers and then texted back to the climbers to help them get back on track.

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