



AAC Publications

Benighted – Inexperience

Wyoming, Grand Teton National Park, Grand Teton

On August 2, at approximately 8:25 p.m., rangers were notified that a party was uninjured but lost on the Petzoldt Ridge of the Grand Teton and needed help. Cell phone reception was poor, but a ranger was able to communicate with the party via text message. The party was comprised of four young men, and they had just completed the rappel from the top of the Petzoldt Ridge. They were concerned about their ability to survive the night due to high winds and cold temperatures.

The ranger explained that help could not arrive until morning and gave them information on the most sheltered location to spend the night. He also provided encouragement and tips on how to survive an unplanned bivouac. Due to low battery power on their cell phone, they were advised to turn it off until morning.

At 6 a.m. rangers attempted to text and call the party multiple times without success. A ranger started up Garnet Canyon in an attempt to intercept the party, in case they had decided to carry on throughout the night. Additionally, two Exum Mountain Guides who were on the Grand Teton were advised of the situation.

At 12:15 p.m., Exum guide Zahan Billimoria encountered the group high on the Upper Exum Ridge, moving slowly toward the summit. Billimoria assisted them to the top and down the Owen Spalding descent route to below the Upper Saddle. A ranger arrived on scene at 2 p.m. and escorted the party below the Lower Saddle, where it was determined they were capable of completing the hike to the trailhead without further assistance. (Source: National Park Service Search and Rescue Report.)

ANALYSIS

First-timers on the Grand Teton often are surprised by the scale of the climb and the difficulty of route-finding, which is why it's wise to do your first climb of the Grand with a guide or experienced mentor.

Carrying adequate clothing, food, and emergency shelter for an unexpected night out is essential on alpine routes. Note the word "adequate"—it is not practical to load packs with enough gear to ensure a comfortable night and still make it up a long technical climb. Pack an ultralight waterproof tarp (such as a siltarp), extra layers, and some extra food, get out of the wind, and huddle for warmth—if a party can stay dry and fed, the night may be miserable but it will not be life-threatening.

Mobile phones are increasingly useful tools for mountain navigation and communication—in certain areas—but a cold night will rapidly drain a phone's battery. Keep the phone warm (inside your clothing), resist the temptation to turn it on for non-essential reasons, and consider carrying an extra battery pack. Rewarming a "dead" phone can sometimes restore limited service. (Source: The Editors.)

Images

Article Details

Author	NPS Search and Rescue Report
Publication	ANAM
Volume	11
Issue	72
Page	107
Copyright Date	2019
Article Type	Accident reports