



## AAC Publications

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### Loose Rock

California, High Sierra, Mt. Whitney, Mountaineer's Route

**Late on August 24, a 27-year-old female was descending the Mountaineer's Route on Mt. Whitney after summiting the peak. At about 13,900 feet, near the top of the big gully that characterizes much of this route, the climber dislodged a three-foot- diameter boulder that rolled over her entire body, fracturing her left tibia and fibula in addition to causing numerous soft-tissue injuries.** Due to the time of day, high altitude, and confined terrain, a helicopter was unable to respond, and the patient and her party spent the night at the site of the accident. Her partners were able to shuttle supplies from their camp at Iceberg Lake, thus keeping her relatively warm and stable through the night.

The next morning, an Army National Guard Chinook helicopter transported seven Inyo County Search and Rescue (SAR) team members to the scene. One member was inserted via hoist near the patient's location to assess and stabilize her injuries. The remaining six SAR members were inserted 1,000 feet below the patient and climbed up to her. The patient was packaged into a litter, and the SAR team executed a single-rope, low-angle lower of about 250 feet to a location where a helicopter hoist was possible.

### ANALYSIS

Loose rock is common throughout the Sierra Nevada, particularly after heavy winters like that of 2018–2019. Inyo SAR received numerous reports during the summer about substantial loose rock in the Mountaineer's Gully, a heavily traveled, narrow route constrained by steep walls that make it difficult to avoid falling or rolling rocks.

Calls for rescue that occur late in the day, at high elevations, in bad weather, or in confined terrain create serious safety concerns for helicopters and SAR teams, and the arrival of help may be significantly delayed. Parties should be prepared to shelter in place for up to 24 hours after initiating a call for rescue. Choosing reliable partners will help. Thanks to her partners' excellent care and ample overnight gear, the patient survived a night out at 13,900 feet with serious injuries. (Source: Inyo County SAR.)

**Images**

## Article Details

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