



AAC Publications

Fall on Ice – Inadequate Gear, Failure to Self-Arrest

Montana, Granite Peak, Granite Glacier

On July 19, two male climbers (ages 24 and 25) ascended the east ridge of Granite Peak (ca. 12,800 feet), summiting at 1:30 a.m. on June 20. They became disoriented while attempting to descend in the dark and decided to bivouac a few hundred meters to the east of the summit and continue in the morning. At sunrise, they began to rappel down the north face, and after 12 rappels they reached the Granite Glacier. Equipped with only running shoes and one ice axe each, they tried to downclimb the 50-degree-plus slope of the glacier. After 25 feet, the first climber lost his footing, was unable to self-arrest, and slid about 75 feet before stopping, uninjured, when he ran into a rock field. His partner fell shortly afterward and also was unable to self-arrest, sliding about 450 feet into a large rock platform and sustaining lacerations and bruising to his ankles. The two climbers activated the SOS function on their personal locator beacon, and Gallatin County Search and Rescue responded within two hours, short-hauling the injured climber off the mountain.

ANALYSIS

The climbers in this incident made a good decision in delaying their descent, and they were prepared for an overnight stay on the mountain. They had not planned to descend via the glacier, so they did not have the equipment needed to successfully navigate this terrain (crampons or even Microspikes), and their inability to self-arrest on the icy glacier directly led to the accidents and associated injuries. The injured climber was lucky to escape a slide of this length with relatively minor injuries and no fractures. (Sources: Gallatin County Search and Rescue and the Editors.)

Images

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