



AAC Publications

Stranded – Weather, Exhaustion

Washington, Mt. Rainier, Liberty Ridge

On May 31, a team of four climbers set out from White River Campground to climb Liberty Ridge.

Three days later, Yevgeniy Krasnitskiy (39), Ruslan Khasbulatov (33), Vasily Aushev (35), and Constantine Toporov (37) called 911 to report they were stranded at 13,500 feet, still about 600 feet below Liberty Cap, due to high wind and one of the men suffering from altitude sickness and exhaustion. Rangers attempted to reach the men with a park helicopter three times on June 3 and 4. A Chinook helicopter from Joint Base Lewis-McChord near Tacoma also responded, but clouds and wind up to 50 mph stopped all the rescue attempts.

The wind had destroyed the climbers' tent, and they had lost a pack with gear and food. Rescuers attempted to drop supplies, but the men were unable to reach them. By June 5, the weather had worsened on the upper mountain, preventing aerial operations. However, the four men were able to climb about half a mile from their previous location, reaching a point near Liberty Cap that was much less affected by the wind. In a brief window of good weather on the morning of June 6, the park helicopter landed near the stranded climbers and flew them out in two groups. The men were treated briefly at a hospital for exposure and frostbite. (Sources: Mt. Rainier National Park and news reports.)

ANALYSIS

Conditions on big mountains change rapidly, and climbers should carry enough clothing, equipment, food, and fuel for unexpected delays. These climbers had heard about a rockfall fatality on Liberty Ridge two days before they started (see report above), so they chose not to camp at the usual Thumb Rock site and instead pushed higher. That last-minute decision contributed to their fatigue and positioned them in a very exposed spot when bad weather moved in. Nonetheless, their ability to reach Liberty Cap on their own greatly facilitated their rescue. (Sources: News reports and the Editors.)

Images

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