



AAC Publications

Fall on Snow – Inadequate Equipment, Inexperience

Wyoming, Grand Teton National Park, Middle Teton

At about 5:45 p.m. on July 17 , the Jenny Lake rangers were notified of an injured 17-year-old female below the south side of Middle Teton. Rangers were immediately summoned to the Lupine Meadows Rescue Cache, as was the park's contract helicopter. At about 6:40 p.m., helicopter 35HX departed from the rescue cache with rangers P. Edmonds and K. Kreis onboard. They located the party west of the base of the Ellingwood Couloir on the Middle Teton however, they encountered very strong winds and were unable to land.

Information from other climbers in the area indicated the injured person had fallen and hit some rocks near the saddle between Middle and South Tetons. She felt that she had broken her leg, but there were no life-threatening injuries and no obvious bleeding. Four members of her original group of 11 were with her, and they had helped her descend a short distance to the current location near the base of the Ellingwood. She felt that she could not continue down.

Because of the high winds, a ground operation was initiated. At 7:50 p.m., rangers G.R. Fletcher and V. Zeilman were dispatched from the Lower Saddle, where they were on patrol. They climbed over the Middle Teton and descended to her location via the Southwest Couloir. Rangers R. Schuster and P. Edmonds were dispatched from the rescue cache in the valley.

Both parties of rangers reached the patient at about 11 p.m. Ranger Schuster interviewed her and learned that after a successful ascent of the Middle Teton by the Southwest Couloir route, she had slipped on snow and slid about 100 feet into rocks, hitting her head and injuring her left lower leg. Schuster confirmed a possible broken leg. Additionally, he found several contusions on her legs and arms with no bleeding.

Two rangers stayed with her through the night, providing overnight gear and medical support, while rangers Fletcher and Zeilman short-roped her four companions down steep snow, rock, and ice to Garnet Meadows and then to the Lupine Meadows parking lot, arriving about 6:30 a.m. Six additional members of her group had previously descended to the parking area and were waiting there.

At 8 a.m. on July 18, the helicopter tried again to extract the patient, but the wind was again too high. Four additional rangers were then sent to her location from the valley with a snow-lowering litter, and the six rangers now on the scene lowered and carried the patient to Garnet Meadows in the litter, arriving about 1 p.m. Six trail crew members with a wheeled litter had been dispatched to the Meadows to assist in a carry-out from there. However, the wind briefly calmed, and at about 2 p.m., the helicopter was able to land, pick up the injured patient, and fly her to the rescue cache, where she was loaded into the park ambulance. (Source: Grand Teton National Park Search and Rescue Report.)

ANALYSIS

This large group was comprised of members of a foreign alpine club. They were poorly prepared even for a moderate mountain route like the Southwest Couloir. The group did not have enough ice axes or crampons for everyone, nor appropriate footwear or clothing for the conditions. (There often is extensive snow travel on this route in mid-July.) The less experienced members were not partnered or accompanied by experienced mountaineers. The Southwest Couloir is a route where a grade (3rd class) or description (it is often called a "hike" online) fails to convey the seriousness of a remote

alpine climb. (Sources: Grand Teton National Park and the Editors.)

Images

Article Details

Author	Grand Teton National Park Search and Rescue
Publication	ANAM
Volume	12
Issue	73
Page	111
Copyright Date	2020
Article Type	Accident reports