



## AAC Publications

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### **Fall, Stranded – Off-Route on Descent**

Wyoming, Grand Teton National Park, Middle Teton

**On August 23, at about 3:30 p.m., rangers received a call from a 24-year-old-man who had summited the Middle Teton via the Southwest Couloir but on the descent quickly became lost.** As he attempted to descend a gully above the Northwest Ice Couloir, he slipped on wet rock and slid about 80 feet before catching himself. With a bruised knee and cut leg, he ascended about 20 feet to a point where he became stuck and called rangers for help. In cold shade at nearly 12,800 feet, with inadequate clothing, he became mildly hypothermic.

A helicopter search located the stranded individual about 80 feet below and west of the Middle Teton's summit. In two separate flights, the helicopter flew two rangers on a 250-foot short-haul rope and inserted them onto the summit of the Middle Teton. Both were in position by about 6 p.m. The two rangers rappelled to the injured climber, lowered him a short distance, and placed him in a screamer suit. Ranger Ronczkowski and the patient were short-hauled to Lupine Meadows at just after 7 p.m. (Source: Grand Teton National Park Search and Rescue Report.)

### **ANALYSIS**

In both this incident and the following report, climbers ascended the standard route on Middle Teton (the Southwest Couloir) to the summit and then got disoriented as soon as they started down. Both ended up deviating significantly from the correct descent the route they had just climbed. On a peak like the Middle Teton, much of your day may be spent on well-beaten trails or an obvious ascent route, such as a snow field with tracks or a gully with cairns. But the summit itself can be a surprisingly amorphous pile of rocks. As you exit the climbing route into the summit area, stop several times to look back and study the descent route from above, identifying landmarks. If the descent doesn't seem familiar or "right," backtrack to the top before it becomes too difficult and try again. (Source: The Editors.)

**Images**

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