



AAC Publications

Hit By Boulder While Scrambling

Wyoming, Grand Teton National Park, Death Canyon

Just after 5 p.m. on July 18, a climber made a 911 call reporting that his partner had been hit by a very large boulder; he then fell and sustained injuries to his back, foot, and hand. The two climbers had been planning to do Raven's Crack, near the mouth of Death Canyon, the next day, and the injured person, a 22-year-old male, had scrambled up a chimney (low 5th class) to scout the approach and collect water. While climbing back down, he dislodged some small rocks that were holding a large chockstone (reportedly "the size of a car"), which rolled into him and barely missed his partner. The climber fell about 20 feet and slid another 10 feet to the base of the chimney.

Based on the reported injuries and the location of the injured person, a helicopter with rangers on board and a ranger on foot were sent to investigate. At approximately 7 p.m., one ranger arrived on scene after hiking in. He requested a litter to package the patient, who had injuries to his back and extremities. Helicopter 35HX delivered the litter via short-haul, and then, at about 8:10 p.m., the helicopter returned to extract the patient. The injured person's partner hiked out on his own. (Sources: National Park Service Search and Rescue Report and notes from the climber.)

ANALYSIS

The injured climber provided some notes about what he had learned:

*Always carry a two-way satellite communication device, and don't hesitate to use the device when necessary.

*I was very cautious while ascending the couloir but not while descending. I assumed everything must be solid since I had climbed up without any issues.

*There was no reason to go up the couloir in the first place. It looked like something fun to climb with the reward of water. However, there was a stream 200 meters below our bivy site. I should have filled my water bottles there.

*Over time you can become numb to exposure and begin to ignore the risks of easy soloing. This accident has been a great reminder to always respect the alpine environment, no matter if you're 500 feet up a wall or doing an easy approach or descent. (Source: Injured climber.)

Images

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