



AAC Publications

Fall on Snow

Wyoming, Grand Teton National Park, South Teton, Cave Couloir

On July 4, a party of two male climbers climbed the South Teton from their camp in the Meadows of Garnet Canyon. They were using ice axes and crampons and wearing helmets. During the late afternoon and early evening, several thunderstorms passed over the Tetons. As the party dealt with these storms, they realized they were descending a slope they had not traveled during their ascent earlier in the day. At approximately 8 p.m., one of the climbers (age 32) slipped and fell near the top of the Cave Couloir, which rises above Garnet Meadows. [Another person who observed these climbers believes the man attempted to glissade and lost control.] He slid approximately 200 feet on snow, stopping after impacting a large boulder. He sustained serious injuries to the left side of his body, including a suspected broken femur or femoral head.

The partner descended to the Meadows, where he contacted a person with a cell phone. At approximately 9:20 p.m., the call was forwarded to the on-duty SAR coordinator, and the caller relayed the location of the incident and provided GPS coordinates. She also mentioned that the partner had grabbed a sleeping bag and was climbing back up to the injured climber.

Climbing rangers Ronczkowski and Hunsaker departed the Lupine Meadows trailhead at 10:30 p.m. They reached the injured climber at 12:55 a.m., assessed and stabilized his injuries, and made him as comfortable as possible for the night. At 6 a.m., the SAR coordinator talked with the rangers on scene via radio and decided a short-haul extraction was needed. Several hours later, the climber was flown to Lupine Meadows, arriving at 9:25 a.m., and transferred to an ambulance. (Source: Grand Teton National Park Search and Rescue Report.)

ANALYSIS

Although many factors likely contributed to this accident, the late hour, storms, and fatigue undoubtedly played key roles. These climbers would have been much better off if they had turned back before the summit instead of pushing on and experiencing storms that delayed and tired them, increasing the likelihood they would stray from the correct descent and, possibly, make the decision to glissade an unknown slope. (Source: The Editors.)

Images

Article Details

Author	Grand Teton National Park Search and Rescue
Publication	ANAM
Volume	12
Issue	74
Page	
Copyright Date	2021
Article Type	Accident reports