



AAC Publications

Stranded – Climbing Alone

Oregon, Cascades, South Sister

On the morning of April 12, a climber (49) was soloing the North Face Couloir of South Sister (10,358 feet) in very thin conditions. He became stranded after climbing into an area with overhanging rocks above, having passed through terrain he was unable or unwilling to downclimb.

Fortunately, the climber was able to access his cell phone and call 911, despite poor cellular reception in the area. The call was made at 8:51 a.m. For several reasons, it took Deschutes County Sheriff's Office Search and Rescue about 6.5 hours to make hands-on contact with the soloist, largely due to the great difficulty in locating his position on the mountain. Despite three flights, visual confirmation via helicopter of his exact location was unsuccessful. Similarly, verbal contact once three SAR members were on scene was difficult due to the mountain's topography and weather. Since the climber had carried no rope or protection, he could not anchor himself during this extended search.

The climber eventually was located when three volunteer rescuers were dropped off at the South Sister summit and then downclimbed about 600 feet and traversed about 500 feet eastward to be directly above the climber. Finally, at about 3:30 p.m., the climber was located. One of the volunteer rescuers rappelled to him, carefully fitted the climber with a harness, and connected him to a rope. Both the patient and rescuer then ascended to the belay. Within an hour, the subject was hoisted off the mountain via National Guard Blackhawk helicopter, with no known injuries aside from exhaustion and near hypothermia.

ANALYSIS

Although this route can be a moderate snow climb in good conditions, it did not have good snow coverage in mid-April, and the climber appears to have gotten off the best line in the steepest section.

Solo climbing is not only potentially dangerous to the climber, but also may be dangerous for bystanders and rescuers. The rescue operation was a huge resource drain and posed significant risk for the rescuers. The Deschutes County Sheriff's Office Search and Rescue team engaged 17 personnel for nearly 14 hours to safely extricate the climber. Multiple helicopter flights were needed for the search, to transport responders and equipment to the summit, and to hoist the subject off the mountain. The subject had not notified anyone of his objective, and he carried no gear with which to descend or anchor himself. (Source: Caleb Bryce, Deschutes County Sheriff's Office Search and Rescue.)

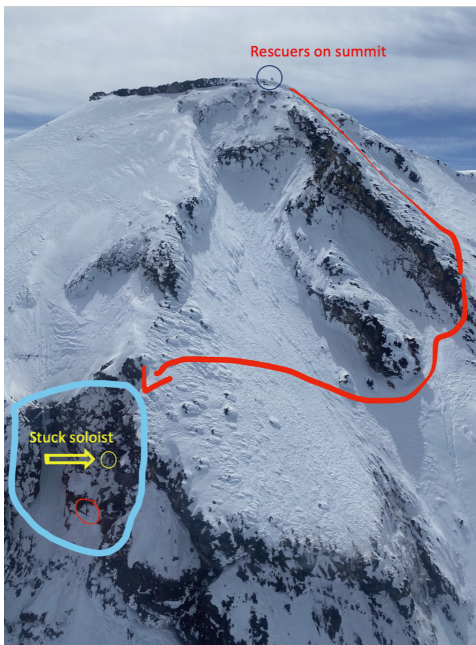
Images



Location of a soloist stranded while attempting the North Face Couloir of South Sister.



Location of a soloist stranded on South Sister.



Rescuers downclimbed from the summit of South Sister to reach a point above a climber who had been stranded for more than seven hours, rappelled to his position, fitted him with a harness, and then guided him to the summit.

Article Details

Author	Caleb Bryce, Deschutes County Sheriff's Office Search and Rescue
Publication	ANAM
Volume	12
Issue	75
Page	77
Copyright Date	2022
Article Type	Accident reports