



## AAC Publications

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### **MULTIPLE FALLS IN ICY CONDITIONS—Five Injured, One Fatality**

California, Mt. Shasta, Avalanche Gulch

**In a 24-hour period beginning on June 6, four incidents saw five climbers injured and a climbing guide killed on Mt. Shasta.** A storm over the prior weekend doused Shasta with rain, snow, fog, and freezing temperatures, creating very firm and icy climbing conditions. All of the incidents took place in Avalanche Gulch between Helen Lake and Red Banks, the steepest section of that route.

The first incident, on the morning of June 6, involved an outfitter guide and her two clients, tied together on one rope. The team was near “Rest Rock,” below Red Banks, when a team member slipped and fell, pulling everyone off their feet. The three slid and tumbled approximately 2,000 vertical feet down the route, eventually stopping below Helen Lake in Avalanche Gulch proper. The two clients suffered major head and extremity injuries, but were expected to make full recoveries. The guide, Jillian Webster (32) of Redmond, Oregon, became unresponsive about an hour and a half after the fall. CPR was initiated by a client on a separate guided trip who was also an ICU nurse. However, the patient was pulseless at the time of the helicopter hoist off the mountain.

The second incident occurred mid-day and involved a single climber (male, 34), who slipped and fell in the same area. Rangers Meyers and Lazzeri climbed back up from 50/50 Flat to respond. At that time, the climber was met by USFS rangers above Helen Lake, near the Upper Moraine, walking but wounded. Rangers assisted him down to the California Highway Patrol (CHP) H-14 helicopter waiting at 50/50. (Weather conditions prevented the helicopter from flying to any higher landing zones.) The climber had an ice axe and crampons but no helmet. He reported that his crampons “slipped off” and caused him to fall.

The third incident happened later in the day and involved climbers from the second incident party. After witnessing their partner slip and fall, two sisters were overcome by fear. They waited just below Red Banks for several hours but eventually tried to descend. One climber attempted to glissade and quickly lost control, sliding down the route and coming to a stop below the Heart. The climber was hoisted off the mountain at 5:45 p.m., ending a busy day on the mountain for rangers, CHP, and Siskiyou County SAR personnel. Her sister descended on foot with Ranger Meyers and was flown off the mountain from 50/50 Flat by CHP.

Both sisters had never climbed the mountain before, did not have helmets, and were wearing lightweight hiking shoes with micro-spikes. They had ice axes but were not familiar with how to use them. They said they had tried to get better equipment but arrived for their climb too early (midnight), when The Fifth Season gear rental shop was not open.

The next morning, on June 7, a solo climber (male, 31), slipped and fell in the same location as the other accidents, near the Heart and below Red Banks. The climber was hoisted off the mountain at 1:30 p.m.

### **ANALYSIS**

In the mountains, weather can dictate climbing conditions, and Mt. Shasta is no exception. Avalanche Gulch is the easiest route to access and most popular on the mountain. The 7,000 vertical-foot ascent exposes the climber to steep snow and ice, rockfall, and weather extremes. In this case, a late-season storm doused Mt. Shasta with rain, snow, fog, and freezing temperatures, creating very firm and icy

conditions. Avalanche Gulch is considered a novice climb 90 percent of the time, but can be very dangerous the other 10 percent. The steep snow slopes on Mt. Shasta turn into no-fall zones when icy conditions are present, and these conditions can last for days or just a few hours. Plan with caution and be open to retreat. (Source: U.S. Forest Service Mt. Shasta Climbing Rangers.)

## Images



A California Highway Patrol helicopter hoists an injured climber to safety on June 6. The climber had fallen down Mt. Shasta's Avalanche Gulch while attempting to glissade.

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