



AAC Publications

STRANDED — Inexperience

California, Yosemite National Park, Tuolumne Meadows, Cathedral Peak

On June 22, at approximately 9:15 a.m., Yosemite dispatch received a 911 call from two distressed and stranded climbers four pitches up the Southeast Buttress of Cathedral Peak (5 pitches, 5.6).

The climbers humbly said they were “incompetent, exhausted, ill equipped, and cold.” Two members of the SAR team were sent to assist the stranded climbers. Fortunately, while the SAR team was hiking to Cathedral Peak, other climbers on the route aided the stranded team and rappelled with them to the ground.

The two climbers had started up the route the day before. They made slow progress. Once they reached the fourth pitch, the climbers felt exhausted and overwhelmed. Unsure of how to rappel—and too intimidated to continue up—the team was forced to sleep on the wall in an unplanned and uncomfortable bivy. Early the next morning, they were able to make a 911 call to request help.

ANALYSIS

There’s arguably no better 5.6 than the Southeast Buttress of Cathedral Peak. Climbers flock to Tuolumne with this at the top of their list. Unfortunately, like these two stranded climbers, many epic on this popular climb. While the route may only be 5.6, it’s still a big day. Route-finding can be a challenge, managing the exposure is intimidating, and the fitness required can catch a surprising number of climbers over their heads.

A couple of takeaways for long, “easy” routes:

Practice self-rescue. Basic self-rescue skills go a long way in situations or emergencies you didn’t plan for. In this case, if the climbers had known how to rappel, using their gear to build anchors as needed, they could have rescued themselves. Practice, practice, practice.

Don’t underestimate an “easy” climb. Don’t be lured into a false sense of security by a modest grade like 5.6. What does the climb actually entail? How many pitches? How far is the hike? What are the descent options? Take time to study the topo and research your climbs beforehand. You’ll be better prepared and have more fun on the route.

Help other climbers. The stranded team on Cathedral were lucky to get help from a pair of fellow climbers. If you see climbers struggling or being sketchy, speak up or lend a hand. (Source: Yosemite National Park Climbing Rangers.)

Images

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