



AAC Publications

FALL ON SNOW

Oregon, Cascades, South Sister

On June 18, at 6:54 p.m., the Deschutes County dispatch center received a 911 call from a person on the northern slope of South Sister (10,358'). The subject was an experienced outdoorsperson (middle-aged male) who was doing wildlife surveys for a government agency. He had backpacked up the normal south-side route on South Sister and was planning to carry over the north side, apparently without knowing that, even in good conditions, the terrain in that area becomes technical, especially in early season.

The subject slid and fell down a snow slope and over a cliff at 5 p.m. He managed to set up camp and call for help via cell phone. He was conscious and responsive when SAR reached him at approximately 8:30 a.m. He had packaged himself in his tent and sleeping bag and spent the night near where he landed. His most serious injury was a broken back. The SAR team moved him down the snowfield in a soft litter approximately 1,000 feet to terrain where an Air National Guard helicopter was able to extract him.

ANALYSIS

The subject fell prey to inexperience, poor local weather conditions, and inadequate equipment. Localized whiteout conditions caused the subject to descend in an unintended direction. In addition, warm weather and late-afternoon warmth caused the snow slope he was descending to become very soft, and it is believed that his accident was a sliding fall in wet and loose snow conditions. He was equipped for a backpacking trip but had no technical mountaineering equipment, nor experience. The fact that he could acquire a cell signal in that remote location surely saved his life. (Source: Caleb Bryce, Deschutes County Sheriff's Office Search and Rescue.)

Images



The northern aspect of South Sister was the scene of a serious unroped fall by an individual with no mountaineering equipment, nor experience. He dropped several hundred feet over snow, ice, and vertical rock steps (yellow box).

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