



AAC Publications

STRANDED AND HYPOTHERMIC – Trapped by Storm

Utah, Wasatch Range, Mt. Olympus

The Salt Lake County Sheriff's Search and Rescue (SLCOSAR) was called out at 5 p.m. on October 22 for three 19-year-old male climbers who were stranded about 100 feet from the summit on the West Slabs of 9,030-foot Mt. Olympus (10 pitches, 5.5). They were hypothermic and pinned down by an early season winter storm.

A Department of Public Safety (DPS) helicopter tried to reach them but had to turn back due to icing. Two ground teams were sent out but were turned back by the weather and by running water on the slabs. SLCOSAR sent a few teams up the summer trail to spend the night near the summit in case there was a break in the weather. In addition, a Black Hawk helicopter was on standby at Camp Williams, and an Air Force Pararescue team from Boise, Idaho, was preparing to assist.

With temperatures expected to drop to 20°F that night, the three stranded climbers needed a lucky break to survive the night. At 10 p.m., there was a brief lull in the storm and the DPS helicopter was able to fly in and hoist the climbers off the West Slabs. The three were hypothermic after spending five hours in the winter storm with only light rain jackets.

ANALYSIS

Paying close attention to weather predictions for the day could have helped avert this situation. According to National Weather Service reports on Friday, October 21, a Winter Storm Watch was upgraded to a Winter Storm Warning that applied to the entire weekend. The difference is significant. A Winter Storm Watch is when conditions indicate a storm "might" manifest. A Winter Storm Warning is issued when a major storm "will" take place. (Source: Salt Lake County Sheriff's Search and Rescue.)

Images

Article Details

Author	Salt Lake County Sheriff's Office Search and Rescue
Publication	ANAM
Volume	13
Issue	76
Page	78
Copyright Date	2023
Article Type	Accident reports