



AAC Publications

FALL INTO CREVASSE

Washington, Mt. Rainier, Kautz Glacier

On May 11, two climbers, who were not identified, made a 911 call saying that deteriorating weather conditions had forced them to halt their ascent of the Kautz Glacier route (W12/3) on Mt. Rainier (14,410'). The Kautz route is the third most popular climbing route on the peak. At that time, the stranded party was at the 12,800-foot level and did not request assistance.

The next morning, the climbers indicated they were still mobile and planning to attempt to descend. Progress of the team was monitored through cell phone signal. As reported in a National Park Service press release, three hours later, at 10:30 a.m., the climbers reported that one member of the party had fallen 80 feet into a large crevasse at 12,200 feet and sustained arm and leg injuries. The individual in the crevasse was able to establish cell phone contact with Mt. Rainier National Park dispatch and his partner on the glacier's surface, but they were unable to self-rescue.

Terrain and weather prohibited immediate rescue efforts by rangers. Deep snow, strong and erratic winds, and limited visibility at the accident site caused significant challenges. On May 13, a Chinook helicopter with the 304th Air Rescue Squadron attempted an early morning rescue operation, but it was unsuccessful due to heavy and erratic winds. They returned several hours later to assess conditions and extricated the first climber by hoist from the Kautz Glacier surface.

Later that afternoon, the National Park Service contract helicopter inserted a team of four climbing rangers at 13,000 feet on the mountain. The team climbed down to the incident location, where they rescued the second climber from the crevasse. He was then flown to safety and further medical care by the park helicopter.

ANALYSIS

There are few other details regarding this accident, though the retreat and subsequent crevasse fall was precipitated by inclement weather. Weather, snow, and route conditions on Rainier can change rapidly and make the difference between a rewarding experience and a tragedy. Before beginning a climb, obtain a current weather forecast. During your climb, turn back if weather conditions deteriorate. Severe winter-like storms on the mountain are not uncommon during the summer.

(Sources: National Park Service and Nationalparkstraveler.org.)

Images



Location of a successful rescue by helicopter of two climbers on the Kautz Glacier route on Mt. Rainier.

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