



AAC Publications

GLISSADING ACCIDENT – Fall into Moat

Wyoming, Grand Teton National Park, Garnet Canyon, Spalding Falls

On June 30 at approximately 2:25 p.m., while on patrol, a National Park Service (NPS) climbing ranger encountered two climbers yelling for help near the top of Spalding Falls. The climbing ranger reported that a 62-year-old male had lost control while glissading down steep snow and fell approximately 60 feet into a moat. The moat had formed between a rock wall and the melting snow.

The patient had been in the moat for 20 minutes under a constant deluge of running water prior to his partner successfully lowering a rope to him. The patient was able to ascend out of the moat with the assistance of the rope just prior to the ranger hearing the calls for help. The patient reported losing consciousness for an undetermined amount of time after the initial fall. Due to the injuries and hypothermia, the ranger requested a helicopter for evacuation. The ranger stabilized injuries and prevented further heat loss while the helicopter responded directly from a wildland fire assignment near Pinedale, Wyoming.

At 4 p.m., a helicopter inserted rangers and equipment to the scene via short-haul. During the rescue response, the patient's climbing partner had become unable to travel safely due to fatigue and fear of the terrain. The SAR coordinator determined that the safest course was to extract the partner via short-haul. The helicopter returned to the scene to extract the second ranger and partner. The patient was transported by NPS ambulance to a local hospital for further treatment. (Source: Grand Teton National Park Search and Rescue Report.)

ANALYSIS

Moats are an often unseen and unacknowledged hazard in the mountains. These deep gaps form where a snowfield meets a cliff or rock face and can be as dangerous as any glacial crevasse. As in this case, moats can also run with water, creating a hypothermia hazard. It's a good idea to not fall into one of these. On Teewinot in 2019, a very experienced climber fell into a moat and was eventually rescued (see ANAC 2020). In June 2013, a climber slid into a moat in upper Garnet Canyon and died (see "Danger Zones" in ANAC 2016). (Source: The Editors.)

Images

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