



AAC Publications

Knee Stuck In Crack

Arizona, Sedona, Queen Victoria Spire

On January 8, Climber 1 (female 25) got her knee stuck in a wide crack on the Regular Route (3 pitches, 5.7) on Queen Victoria Spire in Sedona. Climber 1 was following four friends on her first outdoor climb when she attempted an “alpine knee” while pulling onto a ledge on the second pitch. An “alpine knee” is when you place that joint on top of a high hold and use it for progress, instead of a foot. Rather than helping her onto the ledge, Climber 1’s knee slipped into a four-inch-wide crack, where it wedged and became stuck. Others in her party tried pouring water over her knee in an attempt to free it but were unsuccessful.

At 5:15 p.m., the Coconino County Sheriff’s department was contacted to perform a rescue. By 8 p.m., the SAR team had arrived. It took over an hour to free the climber from the crack, and by then the climber was exhibiting signs of mild hypothermia (they had started climbing at 12:30 p.m.). The climbing party was airlifted off the spire. The stuck climber was not injured and refused treatment.

ANALYSIS

The climbers in this scenario did “everything right,” according to the SAR team. They tried to free their partner, and when they couldn’t, they initiated a rescue. Many relatively easy routes have awkward sections or styles of climbing that may seem above the technical grade when first encountered outdoors. Care should be taken when making a move where a slip or fall could result in injury or entrapment. It took about four hours to free this climber, and temperatures at the crag dropped to around 30°F. Consider worst-case scenarios when preparing for a climb, as unexpected events could result in prolonged exposure to the elements. (Source: Dan Apodaca.)

Images

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