



AAC Publications

Stranded — Inexperience with Snow Climbing

Wyoming, Grand Teton National Park, Teewinot Mountain

On July 14 at 3:45 p.m., NPS personnel received a cell phone call from two young climbers stuck on Teewinot (12,330 feet). The male climbers, aged 19 and 20 years, reported that they were on a snowfield north of the Idol and Worshipper rock formations. They were carrying ice axes but did not know how to use them. They also reported that the snow was soft and they were unable to descend any further. The incident commander coached them on proper descent practices. The climbers then reported over the phone that, despite this assistance, they still needed a rescue.

Two NPS climbing rangers were deployed, and rescuers got to the stranded climbers at 6 p.m. The distressed climbers were lowered on rope systems until they reached the bottom of the snowfield and a dry trail at 7:30 p.m. After resting and rewarming for 45 minutes, the climbers requested that they be allowed to descend at their own slower pace to the parking lot.

ANALYSIS

There have been multiple similar instances of climbers in the Tetons being unprepared for their objectives, both during 2023 and in previous seasons. The summer climbing season in the range often starts with snow-covered peaks and ends with nearly exclusive rock climbing terrain. During transition periods, climbers need to be prepared for the current conditions and not the ideal conditions.

In recent seasons, rangers have noticed an increase in technical climbing routes being listed on hiking-specific applications and websites. Many 4th- and 5th-class rock climbs with high risk and fall potential are listed incorrectly as hikes. Climbers are reminded to gather their route information from fellow climbers and climbing-specific resources. (Source: Grand Teton National Park Search and Rescue Report.)

Images

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