



AAC Publications

Fatal Fall — Climbing Unroped

Wyoming, Grand Teton National Park, Teewinot Mountain

The East Face of Teewinot was the scene of a fatal fall in August 2023. A late start, a large team size, and reliance on a popular hiking app contributed to this tragedy. Photo: Acroterion | Wikimedia

On August 10, a team of nine climbers were attempting to climb Teewinot via the East Face (low 5th class). Upon nearing the summit, a 47-year-old female climber in the group fell about 150 feet to her death. The team decided to send one climber down to get help, while the rest stayed in place and called for help via cell phone. NPS personnel were contacted at 7:30 p.m.

After a helicopter reconnaissance, given the late hour and waning daylight, the decision was made to send a ground team to assist the stranded climbers. Four climbing rangers were deployed at 10:30 p.m., and they arrived on scene at 2:15 a.m. and spent the rest of the night with the climbers. During the morning of August 11, three helicopter shuttles brought the rescuers and climbers back to the valley. A short-haul operation then retrieved the deceased climber.

ANALYSIS

Several factors contributed to this unfortunate accident.

Late Start. The team started their ascent in the afternoon, well after most would recommend. An NPS volunteer who was descending the peak at 2 p.m. informed the team of the lateness of their ascent and that other climbers were already descending from the summit. The volunteer also pointed out their lack of necessary equipment to safely continue. Despite this, the team continued up.

Large Team. Having nine climbers in the group likely contributed to this accident. Larger teams always move slower than smaller teams, as rest breaks and decision-making can be prolonged.

Use of Hiking Apps. This team relied on information taken from a popular hiking application, as previously discussed in this section. This climb, in particular, is listed on several platforms as a hike (see page 96). Interviews with survivors revealed they were under the impression that the East Face of Teewinot was a traditional hike. It is a 5th-class climb. (Source: Grand Teton National Park Search and Rescue Report.)

Images



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Article Details

Author	Grand Teton National Park Search and rescue report
Publication	ANAM
Volume	13
Issue	77
Page	
Copyright Date	2024
Article Type	Accident reports