



AAC Publications

Stranded — Ropes Stuck

Oregon, Smith Rock State Park, Smith Rock Group

A rescuer approaches two stranded climbers after they took the wrong descent and got their ropes stuck on a recessed anchor. Immediately prior, the pair had watched another party rappel off the same incorrect anchor, get their rope stuck (yellow oval), and abandon it. This rescued pair simply threaded their own rope on top of the abandoned rope, almost guaranteeing they would get stranded. Photo: Deschutes County Sheriff's Office SAR

On May 25 at 12:11 p.m., I (Caleb Bryce) was dispatched to two climbers who had gotten their ropes stuck while rappelling. The two subjects were not injured and were secure on a ledge. We reached the two subjects at 3:30 p.m., and both were safely on the ground less than two hours later.

The pair of young male climbers had completed a climb on the back side of the Smith Formation (Smith Rock Group). Rather than descend their ascent route, they tried to follow the rappel route for a popular climb called Wherever I May Roam. There are numerous bolts at the top of the formation, and they chose the incorrect route, rappelling off old bolts that were set back from an edge. This created a lot of friction and the pair were unable to pull their ropes.

Their station was under an overhang, and so we did not have visual or auditory contact from the top. We rigged for a pickoff. Because the subjects were off route, my rescue partner had to construct an intermediate anchor farther down the wall to act as an impromptu rappel station. I went back and cleaned this anchor a few weeks later.

ANALYSIS

It's very common to descend on the wrong route from this popular formation. The friction of the rappel rope on the edge, in addition to the wind, made rope retrieval impossible. The two climbers also lacked the gear and knowledge to ascend a double rope. They were completely dependent on our aid.

Always be certain of the correct rappel line before descending, or at the very least know how to ascend your ropes if necessary. Also, this team did not have adequate layers to be in the wind and shade. Even in a front-country destination like Smith, wind and exposure at a hanging belay can become quite serious. (Source: Caleb Bryce, Deschutes County Sheriff's Office Search and Rescue.)

Images



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