



## AAC Publications

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### Fall on Rock

Washington, North Cascades National Park, Thornton Peak

**On August 3 at approximately 2:40 p.m., the Whatcom County Sheriff's Office notified North Cascades National Park climbing rangers of a potential rescue situation on Thornton Peak.** Initial information was that a 36-year-old female had a lower leg that was said to be both limp and bleeding. Given the possibility of uncontrolled bleeding and a potential threat to the limb, NPS incident command launched a helicopter for a possible short-haul evacuation. A ground-based rescue would require five miles of hiking on trail followed by two additional miles off-trail, with more than 4,000 feet of elevation gain. Additionally, accessing the injured climber would involve technical climbing and possible rockfall.

The NPS helicopter was already in the vicinity attending to an unrelated operation. The incident commander briefed the helicopter crew at 2:45 p.m. Following this briefing, the crew completed a pre-mission risk assessment and launched for flight. At 3:15 p.m. Skagit County dispatch received another distress call relaying that the patient's leg had continued to bleed and that they were applying a tourniquet. At 3:21 p.m., the helicopter located the patient and identified a nearby landing site. The rescue team descended and the rangers reported that the bleeding remained uncontrolled. Concurrently, the crew began packaging the patient. Following a short-haul operation, the patient was transferred to an air ambulance staged in Marblemount, Washington.

### ANALYSIS

In this incident, the climbing party did what they could for a potentially life/limb-threatening injury. An open fracture, coupled with the inability to control bleeding, could have resulted in a far worse outcome. The extremely efficient response time was due in large part to the fact that a helicopter, shared by two other national parks, happened to already be close by. In this incident, many favorable variables resulted in a timely evacuation of a critical patient. This includes the climbers having adequate communication to summon rescue and basic first-aid skills. (Source: North Cascades National Park Climbing Rangers.)

**Images**

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