



## AAC Publications

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### **Fall on Rock – Climbing Unroped**

Wyoming, Grand Teton National Park, Mt. Owen

At approximately 3:45 p.m. on August 12, the Jenny Lake rangers were notified by Climber 1 (age unknown) that his female climbing partner, Climber 2 (age 39), had sustained a 20-to 25-foot fall while ascending the lower couloir on the Koven Route. Climber 1 reported that Climber 2 had leg abrasions, back pain, and was unable to move.

Climbers 1 and 2 had been attempting to climb a slab to the left of the normal Koven Couloir start. Climber 2 was unroped at the time of the fall and was fortunate to stop without tumbling further. Climbers 1 and 2 stated they chose this line because the rock looked cleaner and involved less “dirt climbing” compared with the standard route. Climbers 1 and 2 had intermediate climbing skills.

Helicopter 35HX performed a reconnaissance flight with rangers Hunsaker and Heerdt on board and then landed on the Teton Glacier. Hunsaker and Heerdt left the helicopter and climbed to the scene, arriving at 5:10 p.m.

After a patient assessment, a request was made for one additional ranger, additional medical equipment, and a litter for a short-haul rescue. After receiving additional medical care, Climber 2 was packaged into a litter and short-hauled to the Lupine Meadows rescue cache and then transported to the hospital by park ambulance.

### **ANALYSIS**

Big mountains can present an array of unforeseen difficulties, even on relatively moderate climbs with low technical grades. The Koven Route is usually rated around 5.4 with easy snow climbing. It is considerably easier in early season, when the lower couloir is filled with snow. The climbers’ decision to avoid the melted-out couloir forced a second choice of whether to rope up and place protection on the rock climbing to the left of the couloir. Balancing the need for speed and desire for protection is always a difficult decision in the mountains; in this case, the climbers’ choice led to a fall and a rescue. (Sources: Ranger Ken Kreis, Grand Teton National Park, and the Editors.)

## Images



The entrance to the Koven Couloir (A), seen from the Teton Glacier. When the couloir has melted out, as seen here in early August 2020, climbers must choose between the loose gully or technical rock to the left. The climbing is considerably easier on snow earlier in the summer.

## Article Details

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