

down Garnet Canyon, arriving at the trailhead around 1700. Regarding their failure to obtain a permit, they said they weren't aware that permits were still required to climb.

Magnuson issued Stacy, Walther, and Foreman each an optional appearance violation notice for failure to obtain a permit for an overnight back country stay/bivouac. This regulation is posted at two different locations at each trailhead, in the park brochure and newspaper, and at permits offices. Additionally, seasonal press releases and special notices clarifying that permits are still required for all overnight trips, including those by climbers, were noted as posted in the Jenny Lake Ranger Station and several locations throughout the community. (Source: Mark Magnuson, SAR Coordinator, Grand Teton National Park)

### **FALL ON ROCK, CLIMBING UNROPED, PARTY SEPARATED, EXCEEDING ABILITIES, NO HARD HAT**

#### **Wyoming, Grand Teton National Park, Cascade Canyon**

On September 23, at 2230 Grand Teton dispatch received a call from Mike Shaw (23) reporting his partner, Keith Berlin (24) was missing after the pair had become separated while rock scrambling in Cascade Canyon. Berlin had scrambled up a rock outcropping ahead of Shaw but was not there when Shaw arrived at the same location. Shaw decided that the climbing above there looked too difficult for him and returned to the base of the outcropping. When Berlin did not return, Shaw explored the area, calling Berlin's name for two or three hours but did not receive a response.

At 0030 on September 26, Shaw returned with Rangers Gabriel and Wise to Berlin's last seen location, an area of fractured rock buttresses separated by steep talus near the base of Storm Point's southeast side approximately three quarters of a mile west of Inspiration Point. Gabriel and Wise searched the area for three hours by headlamp but were unable to locate Berlin.

At 0820 an eight member NPS team with two search dogs began searching the area between the Symmetry Couloir drainage and the south face of Storm Point. At 1100 the Bridger-Teton contract helicopter (46N) was called to assist with the search by performing aerial reconnaissance with three spotters on board.

At 1125 Ranger Morris found Berlin among some boulders located several hundred feet up the hill north of the trail. Berlin had evidently fallen a significant distance off a nearby rock outcropping not long after he was last seen by Shaw. Berlin complained of head, neck and hip pain, had sustained facial lacerations and displayed a diminished level of response. Berlin was immobilized with a cervical collar and full body vacuum splint and placed in a litter. After two non-technical lowerings, he was taken down the trail to the west shore boat dock. Berlin was shuttled across Jenny Lake by boat and then transported by ambulance to St. John's Hospital in Jackson. He was treated for injuries that included a crushed lumbar vertebrae and a significant concussion. (Source: Renny Jackson, SAR Ranger, Grand Teton National Park)

### **OFF ROUTE, STRANDED, CLIMBING ALONE, INADEQUATE EQUIPMENT/CLOTHING, EXCEEDING ABILITIES**

#### **Wyoming, Grand Teton National Park, Middle Teton**

On the morning of September 29, Jenny Lake Subdistrict Ranger Mark Magnuson received a report of an overdue climber on the Middle Teton. According to the reporting

party, Susie Struble, Aaron Gams (25) departed his Wilson residence mid-day on September 27 intending to climb the Glacier route and return home late on the 28th. He did not return home as planned and missed work that night.

At noon on September 29, a hasty search team located overnight equipment belonging to Gams, stashed at the Meadows. Search efforts were escalated that day, involving 18 field personnel and the establishment of a base camp at the Meadows. Search progress was hampered by a severe early season winter storm, eliminating helicopter support as an option. An incident overhead team was established and planning for the next operational period accomplished.

On the morning of September 30, an additional 41 personnel had joined the search effort, with field deployment following an 0700 briefing. At 1300 a team of Jenny Lake climbing rangers summited the Middle Teton via the Southwest Couloir and made voice and visual contact with Gams. Gams was stuck on a small ledge on the northwest side of the mountain, approximately 100 feet below the summit. Ranger Bill Alexander was lowered to Gams and the two were raised to the summit by a mechanical advantage system. Efforts to rewarm Gams included hot drinks and heat packs. He was then lowered down the southwest couloir on belay, then by litter, to a helicopter landing zone on the bench north of the South-Middle Teton saddle. This arrival coincided with the first available window of flyable weather, and Gams was flown from the mountain by the park contract helicopter. He was transported to St. John's Hospital by vehicle where he was admitted for hypothermia, frostbite, and exhaustion.

According to Gams, he climbed the Glacier Route as planned on the 28th, but became off-route below the summit. He wandered across the north face and ridge to the northwest couloir. Below the summit of the peak he became ledged out, unable to continue up or retreat. Gams survived two days and two nights on a small ledge, in severe winter conditions, with minimal gear.

## Analysis

On October 2, ranger Mark Magnuson interviewed Aaron Gams in his room at St. John's Hospital. Gams was new to the Jackson area, arriving two to three weeks before the accident. He had been sharing a house in Wilson, WY.

On the morning of September 27, Gams left his residence in Wilson with plans to climb the South and Middle Teton. Arriving at the Moose Visitor Center around noon, he purchased a guide book authored by Richard Rossiter, "Teton Classics." Following a quick review of routes he approached the permits office desk stating that he wished to climb the Glacier Route on the Middle Teton. At that time, ranger Jean Lawrence issued Gams an overnight use permit for the south fork of Garnet Canyon. Gams then departed Lupine Meadows Trailhead, arriving at the Meadows by late afternoon or early evening. Gams chose to camp in the Meadows rather than continuing up to the south fork of Garnet.

Gams left his camp about 0530 on the 28th, arriving at the base of the Glacier Route around 0700 to 0830. He climbed the route to the Dike Pinnacle col, then turned west toward the summit. He then climbed a steep, narrow snow couloir, north of the summit pinnacles, that took him across the north face to the northwest couloir. Gams realized he was off-route. He then looked up the northwest couloir and, thinking it appeared reasonable, started up. Below the summit the route steepened and turned to hard ice, at which time he elected to exit left into a chimney, climbing on rock. Gams said he did not have the proper equipment to climb the last section of the northwest couloir. He had

single leather boots with hinged crampons and one ice ax. Gams continued up this chimney on low fifth class rock which he described as “hard and exposed.” Just short of the summit—60 to 100 feet—he encountered a steep headwall (estimated at 5.7) that was beyond his skill level. After exploring options, Gams determined that he was now unable to continue up or retreat back down the chimney. By mid-afternoon, he resigned himself to being rescued. Gams said he knew that a weather system was approaching but did not know the extent of the forecasted storm.

Gams said he spent the next two nights on a small ledge measuring approximately four feet by ten inches wide. He was clothed in two light-to-medium-weight layers of synthetic clothing with a shell jacket and pants, wearing a stocking cap and gloves. An additional medium-weight jacket was found in his pack, which he had not worn. (Gams stated that he didn’t realize this jacket was in his pack.) He had minimal food and water. (Source: Mark Magnuson, SAR Coordinator, Grand Teton National Park)

*(Editor’s Note: Close to 60 people needed for this one impresses me, and brings to mind Yosemite’s use of citing some climbers under 36 CFR 2.34 (a) (4): Creating a Hazardous Condition.*

*As we were going to press, we received two reports of incidents from Devil’s Tower National Monument, one of which resulted in a fatality from a fall while trying to retrieve a stuck rappel rope; the other was a case of heat stroke. This party was not carrying adequate water, and they were also cited for failing to register for their climb.)*