

## FALL ON SNOW – LOSS OF CONTROL ON GLISSADE, INEXPERIENCE

### **Wyoming, Grand Teton National Park, Nez Perce**

On August 11 between 1100 and 1600, Grand Teton National Park rangers and Teton Interagency Heli-tack personnel performed a 1,200-foot technical snow-lowering operation on the north side of Nez Perce Peak to rescue Laura Mason (21), who had fallen about 100 feet and suffered injuries to her left lower leg. She was glissading a snowfield to the west of the Hourglass Couloir. She was unable to control her speed and crashed into the rocks at the base of the snowfield.

Mason had been with her boyfriend, John Foss, and brother. They thought they were ascending Middle Teton, but were actually ascending Nez Perce. They decided that they needed to glissade down a snowfield some 100 feet to talus below in order to traverse to a better ascent line. In order to keep her pants from getting wet, Mason decided to wrap a garbage bag around her legs and buttocks. The snowfield was between 45 and 50 degrees and contained very firm snow that was icy in spots. She had an ice ax, but no crampons or helmet. She immediately lost control when she started to glissade. While Mason's boyfriend stayed with her, her brother ran down to the Garnet Canyon Meadows where he encountered rangers G.R. Fletcher and B. Hays.

At the accident location, Mason was medically stabilized, administered medications, and secured to a rescue litter. She was carried through talus a short distance, and then lowered about 1,200 feet on snow to the Cave Couloir landing zone. From there, Mason was placed inside the helicopter for a flight to the Lupine Meadows rescue cache, arriving about 1540. She was met by a park ambulance and transported to St. John's Medical Center in Jackson for further treatment.

### **Analysis**

In addition to their inexperience and being on the wrong mountain on a questionable route, Laura Mason was extremely fortunate that she only fractured a leg, especially given the fact that she was not wearing a helmet.

The thoughtful dynamics of the SAR team (including the helicopter pilot) was evidenced by their ability to curtail the short-haul operation when the safety of the operation was compromised by environmental conditions. The ground-based operation took longer, but all returned home safely. No one was so focused on an expeditious short-haul that it obscured good judgment. To maintain a margin of safety, a SAR operation must evolve according to the conditions that are constantly presented. (Source: Ranger George Montopoli – Incident Commander)

## FALL ON ROCK – LOSS OF CONTROL ON BELAY, INEXPERIENCE, HASTE

### **Wyoming, Grand Teton national Park, Death Canyon**

The climbing party of M. Ybarra, L. McLean, and Dana Reis left the Whitegrass Trailhead at 0900 on the morning of August 20 to climb the Snaz in Death Canyon. The Snaz is rated Grade IV, 5.9, and a few of the pitches offer 5.10 variations. From the top of the climb, one can