

the angle of the slope was such that ordinarily there would have been no danger in facing outward while descending. If I had not been wearing a helmet, I would have suffered head injuries as I bounded along during the fall. (Source: R. Reno)

This accident illustrates the need to practice ice-ax arrest regularly so that reactions to a slip become almost automatic and an arrest can be done very quickly. (Source: R. Reader)

FALL ON ROCK, FAILURE OF CHOCK

Manitoba, Gunton, Limestone Quarry

On May 31, 1981, Everett Fee (36), who had been climbing for nine years, was aid climbing at a limestone quarry near Gunton, Manitoba. When he was 30 feet off the ground, the bottom corner of a #1 Chouinard stopper that was holding his weight broke off and the piece pulled. The wire sling on the next chock and another small stopper six feet lower broke at the carabiner when his weight came on it. This produced an upward pull which dislodged all lower chocks and caused him to hit the ground. The fall resulted in a cracked rib and a compression fracture of two vertebrae. (Source: Everett Fee)

Analysis

The chock that pulled was not well placed as only one corner of it was holding full body weight. As stated by the manufacturer, small stoppers cannot be relied upon to hold even a short fall. The use of a double rope technique might have prevented the total failure of the protection system, as it provides two independent sets of chocks. (Source: Everett Fee)

AVALANCHE

Yukon Territory, St. Elias Range, Mount St. Elias

In June 1981, a party of four American climbers, C. Campbell, Mach Ellerby, Ted Handwerk and Jon Iltis, were attempting Mount St. Elias via the Newton Glacier-Russell Col route. At 11:00 p.m. on June 11, as they were skiing from their Camp 3 and up the Newton Glacier, just below the headwall leading to Russell Col, a large ice avalanche came off the northeast face of Mount St. Elias. The following is edited from C. Campbell's account:

This was bigger than any other avalanche we had seen on the trip and we hastily turned downhill and skied as fast as we could. Mack and I were linked together by a 150-foot climbing rope and were 200 yards ahead of Jon and Ted, so we were in more immediate danger. I wasn't certain that we were in its path until the initial avalanche struck a gigantic hanging glacier which really caused an explosive sight and sound. Yet everything happened so quickly, I never really got scared until I looked back over my shoulder and saw the main body of the avalanche just a few yards behind Mack. A split second later, it hit me very hard from behind and everything went dark. I was struck on the head and knocked unconscious and can't remember anything else of the ride. Mack was tossed and turned and beaten badly by the ice. His pack, skis, gloves, and hat were ripped from him. Suddenly the beating Mack was enduring stopped and he saw the sky above—he had miraculously survived being completely buried—although only his head and left shoulder protruded.

I awoke completely buried in the ice. I saw nothing but a faint blue color and I felt no pain. I tried to move my arms which I could sense were stretched out in front of me but they wouldn't budge. I tried to take a single deep breath but the ice pressed firmly against my chest and wouldn't let me take a full breath. I passed out and figured that was it.

Meanwhile, on the surface, the avalanche had missed Jon and Ted, but the wind blast from it nearly knocked them over. When the cloud settled, they rushed over and spotted Mack's head jutting out. They switched their avalanche beepers from transmit to receive and yanked at Mack's beeper around his neck and shut it off. Without assisting Mack, they immediately spread out to search for me. Following a faint signal, Jon spotted an inch of yellow webbing sticking out of the snow. The webbing was attached to my pack which I was still wearing. A shovel they had with them was useless against the ice. They used their ice axes to dig me out. I was lifeless—blue in the face, blood from a gash on my scalp covered my face and, much worse, I wasn't breathing.

While they frantically dug to free my chest, I suddenly choked out some ice and started breathing. I was delirious for a full ten minutes. Finally, I was able to communicate and complained of severe back pains. I was very hypothermic also.

Back at the equipment cache there were two lightweight sleeping bag liners; Ted fetched them while Jon continued to unbury my legs. Unlike Mack, I still had on my pack, skis, and gloves. Mack spent a long time digging himself out with his left hand and a borrowed mitten. He was severely bruised, but his worst injury was to his left hip, which was really giving him pain.

Campbell was dragged back to Camp 3 in a sleeping bag. Ellerby made it back on his own. By prior arrangement, an aircraft flew over to check on them on June 19 and they arranged, by radio, for a helicopter pickup from Camp 3. Fortunately, their injuries were found to be only sprains and severe bruises. (Source: C. Campbell)

Analysis

The route we had chosen to climb Mount St. Elias is extremely prone to problems with avalanches and crevasses. Yet, the level of technical climbing is low which is what lured us into exposing ourselves to the objective dangers. (Source: C. Campbell)

AVALANCHE, STRANDED

Yukon Territory, Mount Logan, East Ridge

On July 1, 1981, a radio message was received from a party of four climbers (ages 30–34) attempting the east ridge of Mount Logan. They had lost most of their gear in a small avalanche. The weather was poor and there had been a great deal of snow. The slope into which they had dug their snow cave at 15,600 feet was fairly unstable and they were afraid of moving up or down for fear of being swept off the mountain in another avalanche. They had a couple of days of food and fuel left, three sleeping bags and three bivy bags.

A helicopter was flown to Kluane Park from Whitehorse, but the weather on Mount Logan prevented a rescue attempt until July 3. At this altitude, the helicopter could not perform a winch rescue so prepackaged supplies were dropped. With these supplies the climbers were able to climb down. They reached the base of the ridge on July 8 and were flown out the same day. (Source: L. Freeze, Kluane National Park)