ACCIDENTS IN
NORTH AMERICAN MOUNTAINEERING

Thirty-eighth Annual Report of the
Safety Committee of The American Alpine Club
and The Alpine Club of Canada

This is the thirty-eighth issue of *Accidents in North American Mountaineering* and the eighth that has been edited and published jointly by The American Alpine Club and The Alpine Club of Canada.

**Canada:** There was a substantial decrease in the number of accidents in Canada during the past two years. In 1983, none were reported from the Yukon, Northwest Territories, Ontario, or Quebec. In 1984, none were reported from the Yukon or the coastal ranges of British Columbia, and the total remained low.

In 1983, falls on rock, snow, and ice accounted for two-thirds of all accidents, and four of the seven fatalities. Avalanches were responsible for only one mountaineering fatality in 1983, but accounted for one fatality each in hiking, helicopter skiing, and downhill skiing activities. In 1984, no single cause dominated the accident statistics. The six fatalities were due to falling rocks and snow, a fall into a crevasse, a river crossing, an avalanche, and an unknown event, the latter involving two climbers on Mount Robson not yet found.

While this publication does not cover accidents outside of North America, it is interesting to note that increasing numbers of Canadians are seeking mountaineering challenges in other parts of the world, and a significant number have been involved in accidents. Incomplete records show that over the last six years, 14 fatalities have occurred, half of which were in Peru. In almost all cases, these were very experienced climbers doing challenging routes. The most recent event in this list was the death in July 1984 of three climbers in an avalanche on Nevado Huascaran Sur. One of the three was Kevin O’Connell, a climber of wide experience who was a member of the ACC Safety Committee and the AAC representative on the Safety Committee of the U.I.A.A. His activities included the systematic testing of climbing equipment, and demonstrating the findings throughout Canada on behalf of the ACC.

We are grateful to the following persons for collecting reports: Ray Breneman, Helen Butling, Lloyd Freese, Peter Fuhrmann, Lloyd Gallagher, Denis Gravel, Ian Kay, David Myles, and Chris Sadleir.

**United States:** While the number of accidents reported for 1984 is about the same as for the previous year, a quick look at the statistical tables will reveal that California came in with about 35 percent more accidents, which offsets Colorado’s showing of only eight accidents. The efforts at data gathering begun in 1983 by the Boulder Emergency Services have slowed temporarily. In 1984, Yosemite Valley was the focus of a detailed statistical study of climbers carried out by AAC member Hubert
Allen, a graduate student in biostatistics at Johns Hopkins University. He did this in conjunction with work begun by John Dill and the Yosemite Clinic — where injured climbers walk in with greater frequency than they do to Park Headquarters.

This year, the U.S. editor began a data base project which will eventually allow cross-referencing to be done by individuals interested in specific categories. The resulting program will have variables in the primary areas of cause, geographic location, terrain, age, and injury type. To help this project make sense, some changes have been made in Table III, and more will be forthcoming. The reader will notice some categories removed or reworded, and that a new section which counts injury types has been added. The latter is an attempt to demonstrate the frequency of common injuries, and eventually to look at any correlations which might exist between accident type and resulting injury.

Over the past few years, the numbers in the category “placed no/inadequate protection” have increased. As was pointed out last year, this is simply because most accidents which result in or from protection pulling out is due to the inadequate placement thereof, not to the inadequacy of the equipment.

A review of the statistics for 1984 shows over a 30 percent decrease in fatalities from last year, with about the same number of accidents reported. Though we do not receive reports on all accidents, we are confident that we have information on all climbing fatalities.

In addition to the Safety Committee, we are grateful to the following individuals for collecting data and helping with the report: Pete Armington, Micki Canfield, John Dill, David Essex, Ruth Mendenhall, Robert Seibert, and Melody Wartzok.

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