

FALL ON SNOW, CLIMBER COLLISION, CRAMPON INJURY

Yukon Territory, Saint Elias Range, Mount Logan

On June 1, 1986, a party of four was climbing the East Ridge of Mount Logan. They began climbing at 1100, after about 60 hours of snow, with an accumulation of about 30 centimeters, with drifts up to a meter. At times, the trail breaker resorted to shoveling a path. After three hours, they reached a cache of food and fuel, and continued across a crevassed area that led to a prominent ridge at the top of which they hoped to establish Camp 3. One rope team of two began breaking trail up the ridge. The other team followed, meeting the first team where one of them was belaying the other one from below.

The first team was starting up the right (north) side of the ridge, but the second team preferred the left side. The second team therefore decided to move up independently, intending to cross over to the left side. Later, the first team leader had gained the ridge, and was belaying his second. At the same time, the lead climber on the second team was clearing away snow and chopping steps in snow-covered 50-degree ice directly above the second member of the first team.

He lost his footing and fell ten meters to the climber below. His crampons caused a serious cut in the lower climber's head. The two fell together for another three meters until stopped by the belay from the top of the ridge. The belayer could not see or hear what was going on, but kept tension on the rope.

The rope tension and lack of communication compounded the difficulty the three lower climbers had in sorting things out. The two uninjured climbers belayed the injured one down the lower belay station, and the rope teams regrouped. Some first aid was given to the wound, a cut about five centimeters long, which was bleeding quite badly. Then they all descended to Camp 2, where the wound was cleaned and dressed. By 1400, the climbers were drinking tea and recounting the day's events. (Source: Lloyd Freese, Kluane National Park)

Analysis

A courteous climber does not drop things, including himself, on fellow climbers. (Source: J. Whittaker)