

LIGHTNING

British Columbia, Purcell Mountains, South Howser Tower

On August 3, 1987, two climbers (30) left the Bugaboo Hut and climbed in good weather to the base of Great White Headwall on the Chouinard–Beckey route on the west face of the South Howser Tower (3300 meters). The following day the pair reached the start of the lower-angled summit ridge immediately following the tension traverse pitch. The weather had deteriorated over the preceding half hour with scattered squalls moving through the area, but none affecting the Howsers. Continuing over the summit and down the standard route seemed preferable to rappelling the ascent route. They were not far below the summit when a nearby small pinnacle on the ridge began to hum. The climbers got rid of their hardware and sat on their packs and ropes in a notch beneath the pinnacle. Then the humming stopped, and they did not feel the skin or hair sensation that would indicate a gathering charge. But within one or two minutes, there was a sharp crack, and both climbers were hit by ground current. They screamed uncontrollably as the current ran through them for seconds.

Afterward, one climber had lost feeling in both legs, and his right leg was paralyzed. Later, entrance and exit wounds were found on his right hip and on both sides of his ankle. The other climber had generalized numbness and muscle weakness without full paralysis. His right forearm was painful, and he could see that holes were burned through several layers of clothing. Entrance and exit wounds were later found on both sides of his forearm and on his right ankle. In addition to the small full-thickness burns at the entrance and exit wounds, there were patches of superficial burns where the climbers' polypropylene underwear had ignited.

Motor control was gradually regained over the next half hour, and the climbers rappelled their ascent route. Then they hiked back to the Kain Hut where their burns were cleaned and dressed. (Source: J. Bird and C. Atkinson, Bugaboo Glacier Provincial Park)

Analysis

The climbers did all the classic, right things. They were not on the summit or under overhangs. They insulated themselves by sitting on their packs. (Source: J. Bird and C. Atkinson, Bugaboo Glacier Provincial Park)

CORNICE COLLAPSE

British Columbia, Interior Ranges, Raft Mountain

On June 24, 1987, Jill Hockey (30), an Australian exchange teacher, and three companions, made the one-and-a-half-hour hike to the top of Raft Mountain, a 2400-meter peak near Wells Gray Provincial Park. She was taking photographs from the top when the cornice on which she was standing broke away, and she fell 600 meters to her death. (Source: *The Vancouver Sun*, June 26, 1987)

Editor's Note: This is a hiking accident, but the danger at the top is one that is important to mountaineers.