

CANADA

AVALANCHE ON ICE CLIMB

Alberta, Rocky Mountains, Cascade Waterfall

On February 26, 1988, two experienced British climbers, John Burns (33) and Stephen Travers (32), attempted Cascade Waterfall, the most popular ice climb near Banff, during an unseasonal warm spell. They climbed the two moderate approach pitches and arrived about noon at the base of the steeper top pitches. At this point they decided that because of the heat they would retreat. However, to reach an obvious bolt station, they had to cross the falls to the right side.

Burns reached the anchor and clipped in. While Travers was still in the middle of the falls, a large wet slide, originating 300 meters above, hit him and swept him off. Wet snow accompanied by rock kept coming for about a minute and a half. The belayer held his rope until he felt a relief in the force. The rope had broken, severed by falling rock. Fortunately, a second haul line was connected to Travers and had also been tied off to the anchor. After falling the length of the rope, Travers pendulumed sideways out of the main force of the avalanche and was left dangling at the foot of a rock band.

Cascade Waterfall is located close to the highway, and the avalanche happened to be observed by two park wardens who then checked whether any climbers were on the falls. As a result, a rescue commenced almost immediately, and the Warden Service was able to heli-sling the victim off to the hospital within 1.5 hours of the accident. The victim had chest injuries, and at the Banff hospital it was learned that he was suffering from serious internal bleeding. He was transferred by air ambulance to a major hospital in Calgary, and has recovered. The other climber suffered rope burns. (Source: T. Auger, Warden Service, Banff National Park, and the Banff Crag and Canyon)

Analysis

The climbers had flown over from England for an ice climbing holiday. This was their last day of a week's climbing. They did not seek local information, using only a guide book for information. A daily avalanche hazard forecast as well as local climbing information is available in Banff. It had been warm for two days and the risk of wet avalanches was high. The climbers were lucky on several counts, including an unusually rapid rescue response. (Source: T. Auger, Warden Service, Banff National Park)

FALL ON SLAB AND SCREE, NO EQUIPMENT

Alberta, Rocky Mountains, Cascade Mountain

In July, 1988, two young scramblers looking for an outing decided to climb Cascade