

CANADA

FALL ON ICE, INADEQUATE PROTECTION

Alberta, Rocky Mountains, Bow Summit Area, Wet Dream Falls

On Feb. 2, 1993, a party of two were climbing the first pitch of this ice gully. The leader, P.F., placed a screw midway up his 16 meter lead, and unsuccessfully attempted to put in another just below the top. He fell while pulling over the edge, and a ground-fall resulted. He suffered a compound fracture of one ankle and a fractured talus bone of the other. He was slung out by the Warden Service rescue team.

Analysis

If the leader had succeeded in placing an additional ice screw before making the tricky move to reach lower-angled ice, the consequences of having his tools pull out may not have been as severe. (Source: Banff National Park Warden Service)

(Editor's Note: The victim expresses his good fortune in having had a capable and rational companion with a considerable amount of emergency training, and also makes special note of the Parks Service wardens and the helicopter pilot who handled his evacuation quickly and with skill and understanding.)

FALL ON ICE, NO PROTECTION, FATIGUE, INEXPERIENCE

Alberta, Rocky Mountains, Mount Athabasca

On the morning of February 13, 1993, a party of two from Washington state set out to climb the north face of Mount Athabasca. Their intent was to complete the route and return to their vehicle later the same day, but they were not able to move as fast as they intended. They were forced to bivouac overnight on a small ledge just below the summit. They were not adequately equipped for that, although they did have a stove and a pot. Unfortunately the pot, used to heat water, was knocked over and down the north face shortly after sunset.

The following day, the climbers, although dehydrated and hypothermic, were able to move, and completed the route. During their descent, however, they became disoriented. The lead climber fell on steep ice, and pulled his partner down with him. Both fell an estimated 150 meters, coming to rest in the snow below the ramp on the standard route. One of them sustained a broken ankle, and the other suffered internal injuries as well as a number of broken bones.

Park Wardens had been notified earlier in the day that these climbers were overdue, and so at the time the accident occurred, they were preparing to begin a search of the mountain. The injured climbers were spotted from the air only 20 minutes later, and were subsequently evacuated by heli-sling.

Analysis

As a result of having to stay out overnight with inadequate preparation, both climbers were dehydrated and hypothermic, so their mental and physical condition was suspect at the time of the accident. When climbing in the winter, extra care must be taken to carry equipment which will ensure that hydration, warmth and energy are maintained in the event an unscheduled overnight stay is required. (Source: Jasper National Park Warden Service)

ROCKFALL, BAD LUCK

Alberta, Rocky Mountains, Banff Area, Cascade Falls

Two male climbers, (26 and 27) arrived from France in February, 1993, for an ice-climbing holiday. On their first day in the area, they chose Cascade Falls, a popular grade-three waterfall climb near Banff.

It was mid-morning on February 26 and the weather was clear and cold: climbing conditions were good. Another party was already well up on the climb, and the climbers were strapping on their crampons when a spontaneous rockfall started in the cliffs 45 meters to the right of the upper ice; a piece, probably about the size of a piano, came out and broke up as it flew down the intermediate slopes toward the ledges at the foot of the falls. The victims could not see the incoming rocks until the last moment because of their position. They were standing on a shelf at the base of the slope leading up to the climb when they were hit. One of them was killed.

Analysis

Rockfall is a fact of life in the Rockies, but is mostly considered a problem in confined gullies and below steep cliffs, and is also more associated with warm weather. These climbers were on a wide slope in almost perfect alpine conditions; this is an instance of very bad luck rather than unsafe conditions or poor position. (Source: Banff National Park Warden Service)

FALL ON ROCK, UNROPED, EXCEEDING ABILITIES, PARTY SEPARATED

Alberta, Rocky Mountains, Mount Athabasca

A party of two set out to climb the north ridge of Mount Athabasca on the morning of February 26, 1993. They crossed the North Glacier to gain access to the ridge; once on the rock, they elected to unrope. At the section of the ridge identified as the "crux," the two climbers split up in order to determine the best route. When one of them realized the alternative he was trying could not be negotiated, he attempted to climb back down to his partner's position. While doing so, he lost his footing and fell an estimated 275 meters down the east face of the north ridge. His partner was able to retrace their ascent route, and reported the accident to the Jasper Warden Service; by 1800, they had recovered the victim's body from a steep section of the Boundary Glacier.

Analysis

Both climbers were experienced and had the proper equipment to reach their objective, but the decision to unrope proved to be fatal. The section of the route where the accident took place is described as having "a great variety of rock quality," typical of the