

Snow Dome. The sky was clear, but a storm system was expected to move through the area later in the day. Some time during the climb, an avalanche swept the entire climbing party off the route and into crevasses near its base. All three climbers perished.

Wardens in Jasper National Park were notified the following day that the climbers were overdue, but due to poor visibility and extreme avalanche hazard, rescuers were not able to determine the whereabouts and condition of the climbing party for three days. On March 24, articles of clothing and climbing equipment were found in avalanche debris below the route. Periodic searches of the area were conducted by the Warden Service over the next two months, and the remains of all three climbers were recovered.

Analysis

Throughout the winter of 1992-1993, alpine climbing conditions in the area were excellent due to record low snow falls. However, they changed dramatically in mid-March as a number of spring snow storms tracked through the region. (Source: Jasper National Park Warden Service)

(Editor's Note: "Slipstream" is a dangerous route at even the best of times, as it is below a substantial snow field and seracs of the summit ice cap of Snow Dome. It has claimed several lives)

FALL ON ROCK, UNROPED, HANDHOLD FAILURE

Alberta, Rocky Mountains, Cosmology Crag

At 1515 on March 31, 1993, J.B., a member of the Association of Canadian Mountain Guides, contacted Bow Valley Provincial Park to report that an unidentified climber had fallen approximately 25 meters, coming to rest on the canyon floor of Cougar Creek.

It was learned that C.N. and his partner had unsuccessfully attempted a hard route on Cosmology crag; C.N. then suggested his partner go bouldering while he soloed an easier route (5.5) to set up a top rope on the route they had been working on. About 20 meters up, C.N. pulled on a large block, but it came loose and he fell with it, striking a sharp pyramidal stone on the ground, which punctured his helmet. His partner and another couple also climbing nearby came to help him, but when they removed the coil of rope which he had been carrying over his shoulder, they determined he had no vital signs.

Alpine Specialists G.F. and L.G. and several Park Rangers were alerted. They advised Canmore R.C.M.P. of the situation, and requested Bow Valley Ambulance to respond at the Cougar Canyon trailhead. Rangers accompanied the ambulance staff to the accident scene about two kilometers up the canyon, with life support equipment, but at 1541 they reported that the victim had died. A Canmore Helicopters unit arrived at the trailhead a few minutes later, and the R.C.M.P. were flown to the site to investigate. The body was transported by helicopter sling to the waiting ambulance at 1625, and all personnel were clear of the scene by 1650. (Source: George Field, Kananaskis Country Alpine Specialist)

Analysis

Soloing an "easy" route to top-rope a difficult one is a widespread practice, and there may be a tendency to ignore the hazards of the easy climb while doing so. The use of

rope and protection is intended to nullify falls of all causes, not just those that result from pushing the limits. (Source: Orvel Miskiw)

AVALANCHE, POOR CHOICE OF ROUTE

Alberta, Rocky Mountains, Plain of Six Glaciers

Two climbers visiting from Europe attempted to reach Abbot's Pass from Lake Louise on May 11, 1993. They turned around due to the evident avalanche hazard, but on the way back they were hit by a large class-three wet avalanche as they crossed a ledge on the summer trail.

J.U. (29) was near the edge of the slide and escaped by pasting himself under a slight overhang, where the avalanche roared over him. His female companion was swept over a short cliff and carried about 100 meters, but luckily ended up on top of the huge deposit with no serious injuries other than a broken leg. J.U. relocated her to a safer spot and went for help.

Analysis

It is unusual for people to approach Abbot's Pass this early in the season. They realized the difficulties of the glaciated basin known locally as the "Deathtrap" as they approached it, but were avalanched late in the afternoon of a hot spring day, on what appeared to be relatively tame ground on the way back down the valley. Also, following the summer trail put them in a position of crossing an obvious huge slide path on dangerously exposed ledges, while an alternative route was available. (Source: Banff National Park Warden Service)

FALL ON ROCK, CLIMBING ALONE AND UNROPED, NO HELMET

Alberta, Front Ranges, Canyon Creek Crags

L.O., an experienced and capable rock climber who had pioneered many difficult routes, went climbing alone on May 25, 1993, at Canyon Creek in the Elbow West district of Kananaskis Country. He was reported overdue that night about 2330.

Cochrane RCMP contacted Kananaskis Emergency Center and requested a search dog. District Rangers began to assemble resources for a search, and reached Canyon Creek about 0030. They began to scan the area from trucks with floodlights powered by an emergency generator about 0115 (May 26), and the RCMP began a ground search with their dog about 0130.

At 0420 the RCMP dog master called in to report that the subject had been found dead about 200 meters down and across the slope from his rope, which indicated the section of cliff on which he had been climbing and apparently from which he had fallen. He was wearing friction shoes and had a chalk bag, but no helmet. Disturbed vegetation and broken twigs made it clear he had survived the fall and had crawled some distance. An RCMP investigator arrived at 0555, and the Medical Examiner's unit arrived at 0655 to remove the body. Recovery operations were complete by 0800, May 26. (Source: George Field, Kananaskis Country Alpine Specialist)

Analysis

The victim was well-known in the Calgary-Canmore climbing community and to some of the Parks staff for his efforts in route development. He would typically be working on