

SLIP ON STICK, WEATHER, DARKNESS, FATIGUE

Alberta, Rocky Mountains, Mount Ishbel

On June 18, 1994, O.M.(45) and C.C.(39) started off in sunshine to climb Mount Ishbel (2908 meters), near Banff, by the South Ridge. After a few hours of routine scrambling and a few interesting spots along the ridge, clouds approached. As they reached a technical step near the summit at about 1700, they were struck by an energetic electrical sleet squall. They quickly took shelter in a cave a few meters down the east face. After about an hour, the weather had not improved much, and as it was not safe or practical to either continue toward the summit or retreat along the ridge, they decided to use the few remaining hours of daylight to descend the rubbly east face, some 500 meters of alternating scrambling down snow-covered scree, downclimbing, and two rappels. In the valley east of the peak, they stopped for some time to eat, pack climbing gear, and shed excess clothing for the hike out. When they resumed their exit, it was dark enough that they needed their headlamps, and falling sleet made the footing treacherous. As they walked down the valley, about 100 meters before a continuous stand of mature forest, C.C. put his right foot on a stick imbedded in the sloping creek bank. His foot slipped sideways, transferring his weight awkwardly onto his left foot. C.C. heard a 'pop' and went down in pain. After a few hours under big trees and tending a small fire on a sheet of rock with his unfortunate partner, O.M. began hiking out to the road at first light (0530), and about 0700, he reported the mishap to Banff Park Warden J.O., who was already beginning to investigate the overdue status of the climbers. Within a half hour, a helicopter was on the scene, and the efficient Banff National Park Rescue team, spearheaded by Marc Ledwidge, evacuated the victim to an ambulance at 0830, for transport to the hospital in Banff, where he was found to have a fracture of the left fibula just above the ankle.

Analysis

This simple injury on the hike out was rather ironic in view of the relatively hazardous descent which the climbers had just completed, possibly a case of undue complacency after the main difficulties. Contributing factors were the poor visibility due to rain and darkness, and treacherous footing, also caused by the rain, and fatigue. (Source: Orvel Miskiw)

RAPPEL FAILURE—INCORRECT USE OF EQUIPMENT

Alberta, Rocky Mountains, Heart Creek

On June 26, 1994, Alan C. was rock climbing at Heart Creek slabs with friends. After completing a pitch, he was being lowered by his belayer from below, with the rope running through a sling. When he was part of the way down, the rope "burned" through the sling, and Alan fell to the bottom of the climb, sustaining a fracture of the pelvis. His friends carried him down the Heart Creek trail as far as the first bridge, where they were met by personnel of Canmore Emergency Services, who placed him on a back board and proceeded to assess his condition. Meanwhile, a Kananaskis Central District ranger on patrol noticed the C.E.S. vehicles parked at Heart Creek, and informed his office. Upon asking C.E.S. about the situation, they were told about the accident for the first time. The ranger called for a wheel stretcher, and then hiked up the trail, finding the victim at the first bridge with his friends and the paramedics. They resumed the evacuation, and met two more rangers with the wheel stretcher, about halfway to the road. Alan was transferred to

the wheel stretcher, and taken to an ambulance at the trailhead. Park rangers were refused personal information about the victim, under authority of the Ambulance Act, until several days later. (Source: George Field, Alpine Specialist, Kananaskis Country)

Analysis

Most climbers instinctively know that running a loaded rope through a sling is to be strictly avoided, yet we have reported a number of accidents like this in the last couple of years. If a carabiner or rappel ring is not available or cannot be left behind, then the descending climber should rappel on the doubled rope, or downclimb the route with a top-rope belay—or walk off.

Regarding the awkward circumstances of the evacuation, Park officials are concerned that they were not immediately notified, as they could have responded in half the time actually taken in this case. Also they feel the Ambulance Act should not be used as an obstacle to their obtaining information needed for risk management purposes. (Source: Orvel Miskiw)

SLIP ON SNOW, INATTENTION, INADEQUATE EQUIPMENT Alberta, Rocky Mountains, Mount Lawson

Elizabeth N. (45) and John D. climbed Mt. Lawson (2795 meters), a moderate scramble, on July 9, 1994, and were descending a steep, narrow gully in good snow at about 1430. Elizabeth slipped out of control and slid some 90 meters, partly head first, striking rocks along the side of the gully a number of times, before being stopped by rocks. These may have saved her from a fall over cliffs, but she sustained a broken collarbone, dislocated shoulder, scalp lacerations, and many cuts, abrasions, and bruises. John descended alone to Fortress Junction and phoned Peter Loughheed Provincial Park officials about two hours after the accident. Bow Valley Park rangers were notified in turn, as Mt. Lawson is in their district. About 1700, the victim was spotted from a rescue helicopter on the slopes of the mountain. A few minutes later a ranger was flown to her position by helicopter sling, followed by two more—one at a time because of strong winds. Shortly after 1800, Elizabeth was evacuated by helicopter sling to Bow Valley Ambulance at Fortress Junction and then transported to Foothills Hospital in Calgary. (Source: George Field, Alpine Specialist, Kananaskis Country)

Analysis

These climbers are experienced, and feel they were well within their abilities where the accident happened, but that they should have been wearing helmets and carrying ice axes for the descent. They were using ski poles, which are not very good for self-arrest. Elizabeth slipped when her concentration lapsed, was not able to regain control immediately, and accelerated because of the steep slope. She says she was not cautious enough for the seriousness of the terrain. (Source: John and Elizabeth)

FALL ON ROCK, PLACED INADEQUATE PROTECTION, EXCEEDING ABILITIES

Alberta, Rocky Mountains, Canmore Area, Stoneworks Crag

At about 1730 on July 10, 1994, Ian B. was climbing with two friends at the Stoneworks when he took a two-meter leader fall near the top of a pitch. His last protection