

FALL ON ICE, PLACED NO PROTECTION

Alberta, Rocky Mountains, Mount Aberdeen

A party of four were starting up the bare lower ice slopes of the North Glacier on Mt. Aberdeen (3152 meters) on July 23, 1994. They were roped together with a spacing of about 10 meters, with no protection or belays. The leader fell, dragging his party down with him and nearly knocking off a party of three below them. They slid about 100 meters onto the rocks below the ice tongue. One person suffered a serious compound leg fracture and a compound elbow fracture, as well as minor injuries. The leader and the other two party members sustained minor injuries.

The second climbing party assisted in stabilizing the badly injured climber and sent someone for help. The victim was treated on site by a rescue team, and then transported by helicopter sling. The rest of the party were also evacuated.

Analysis

Although the ice where the accident occurred has a slope of only about 30 to 35 degrees, the possibility of holding an unprotected fall is virtually nil for climbers below. If a rope is used on this terrain, belays and protection should also be used. (Source: Marc Ledwidge, Banff National Park Warden Service)

FALL ON ROCK, INADEQUATE BELAY, DISTRACTION, HOT WEATHER

Alberta, Rocky Mountains, CMC Valley

R.B. and B.T. were climbing in CMC valley on July 23, 1994. At 1100 the weather was hot and R.B. was having trouble leading the first pitch of a two-pitch route. After a half hour on the lead, with two pieces of protection in place, he came down, saying he could not think clearly because of the heat, and asked B.T. to take over. With R.B. belaying and other climbers nearby, B.T. started up. After reaching R.B.'s high point, B.T. continued higher, placing one more piece and then clipping in to a fixed piton. About two meters above the piton, he fell, scraping his right hand and his torso on the rock before being stopped by the rope some seven meters below the piton. He righted himself, and then R.B. lowered him to the base of the climb, a distance of six meters. B.T. walked out to the road with two other members of the group, and reached hospital in Canmore at 1800. B.T. was found to have a sprained right wrist and thumb, a torn abdominal muscle, and was dehydrated.

Analysis

The route was not considered difficult, and B.T. had climbed harder ones in the days before his accident. Also, he didn't think he was in a high risk situation. Otherwise, he may have placed more protection. The hot weather contributed to loss of concentration for both climbers, and B.T. feels he should have taken the day off, as he had suffered heat exhaustion the previous day. B.T. did not know R.B. very well—R.B. admitted that he had let out several meters of rope when B.T. fell because he was distracted by talking with someone while belaying. In the future B.T. will ensure his belayer is paying closer attention to belaying. (Source: Barrie T., the victim)

FALL ON ROCK, FAULTY USE OF CRAMPONS—FAILED TO PUT THEM ON

Alberta, Rocky Mountains, Mount Collier

Two climbers, R.H. and H.B. (50), were descending Mt. Collier (3216 meters) on July 25, 1994, roped together. H.B. belayed R.H. across a 40-degree snow and ice slope, then

luckily asked for a belay while he crossed it himself. As he was about to move from steep rock onto the snow, he slipped and fell on his back among rocks, then slid and rolled about 12 meters over rocks before being stopped by the rope and swinging over onto the snow. He sustained painful back injuries through which he temporarily lost color vision and the use of his legs, so he was unable to continue. H.B. is certain that, without the belay, he would have dragged R.H. over a high cliff. R.H. lowered H.B. to a rock step, tied him in to an anchor, and descended alone to get help. H.B. was evacuated later that afternoon by the Banff Park Warden Service, using a helicopter and sling. He soon regained his normal vision, but spent several months recovering full physical mobility, and still had residual back pains eight months later.

Analysis

The line chosen for the traverse which R.H. and H.B. were doing at the time of the accident was awkward, so the mishap may have been avoided if they had taken a different route. The rock was steep and wet, with poor ledges and holds. Also, the fall may have been prevented if H.B. had been wearing his crampons instead of carrying them on his pack. As it is, it seems they were responsible for most of his back injuries without actually penetrating. He fell on them, causing severe pressure points in his back. In any case, if the traverse had been protected, any slip which did occur would possibly have been neutralized. (Source: H.B., the victim)

RAPPEL FAILURE, INADEQUATE PROTECTION

Alberta, Rocky Mountains, Lake Louise, Back of the Lake Crag

On July 26, 1994, D.O. (29), a sport climber, took a serious fall at the Back of the Lake, a rock climbing area at Lake Louise. The accident occurred on a one-pitch climb called Swamp Thing (5.9) after D.O. inadvertently climbed past the top station of the route. When he realized his error, he decided to 'lower out,' using a # 1 stopper as his anchor. On the way down, he had just removed a # 5 stopper when the top anchor pulled out. He fell about twelve meters and landed among rocks in a shallow pond at the foot of the climb. Other climbers quickly got him out of the water, but he had a severe compound leg fracture, spinal fracture, sprained ankle, and various other injuries.

Analysis

D.O. relied on a single-placement anchor, then further compromised the odds when he recovered his protection on the way down. In this case, he still had some luck on his side, as a fall a few inches either way could have been fatal. (Source: Tim Auger, Banff National Park Warden Service)

FALL ON ROCK, PLACED INADEQUATE PROTECTION

Alberta, Rocky Mountains, Mount Yamnuska

While leading the third pitch of Red Shirt on July 30, 1994, Andrew F. (50) fell about nine meters, striking the belay ledge with his head. His helmet fell off, and he fell another three meters before being stopped by his rope. He was secured on the belay ledge above the second pitch by his companions, and then three of them rappelled to the base of the cliff while the other two stayed with him. A Park ranger was nearby at the time and reported the accident to Bow Valley Provincial Park at 1415. About a half hour later, rangers flew to the accident site in a helicopter to assess the situation. Then four rangers were transported