

the lower left leg, right talus (ankle), and two ribs, as well as extensive bruising of the chest, and hypothermia. S.P. was also flown to the ambulance at the base, but did not respond to advanced life support efforts.

Analysis

This was a very strong and experienced party which consciously made route decisions based on observations of mountain conditions in the days and hours leading up to the accident. Recent snowfall which had produced some moist, loose-snow avalanches a day or two earlier had stabilized with cooler alpine temperatures. However, the avalanche start zone was in a small north-facing basin just below the summit. The snow pack in that area was not significantly affected by the warmer temperatures which produced the recent avalanches generally observed at lower elevations. As a result, a thin layer of well-formed facets buried by the recent storm did not settle and bond well to adjacent snow layers. This unusual and isolated condition is similar to deep instabilities which usually develop in the Rockies during the winter season and therefore, apparently, took this group completely by surprise. Mountaineering is not an exact science and will always possess inherent and often unanticipated risks. (Source: Jasper National Park Warden Service)

(Editor's note: Experience occasionally seems to be a liability in mountaineering. A less experienced party may have chosen an easier descent route in view of the recent snowfall.)

FALL ON SNOW, NO BELAY, UNABLE TO SELF-ARREST; THEN— FATIGUE, FALL ON SNOW, LOST ICE AXE

Alberta, Rocky Mountains, Mount Victoria

A British couple, Luc (29) and Eva (31) Parker came to Canada in the summer of 1994 for a two-week climbing holiday. On the morning of Thursday, September 1, they left the Abbot Pass hut (2927 meters) to climb Mt. Victoria (3465 meters) by the normal Southeast Ridge Route. Along the summit ridge, the Parkers apparently slipped on steep snow while ascending from the notch known as "The Sickle." They were roped together and slid down the steep snow face, then over an ice cliff about 15 meters high. Luc fell directly into a crevasse at its foot and was probably killed instantly, as his neck was broken. Eva landed on the surface near the crevasse, and was likely not seriously injured because she untied from the rope and began a solo escape from the east face. She found herself below the ice cliff, and in the direction she searched, she probably could see no way to return to the summit ridge, so she began a treacherous descent. Her tracks showed that she managed to make her way through a stretch of heavily crevassed icefall, then descended the rest of the East Face to the top edge of a huge rock wall overlooking the lower Victoria Glacier. Then she began to traverse south across the face to gain access to the easier lower glacier where she could reach the hut. In the process, she crossed narrow snow ledges and a delicate rock traverse where the ledges pinched out. She began to cross a final snow and ice slope, wearing crampons but apparently having lost her axe and mitts sometime earlier. She quickly lost her footing and fell 100 meters down the slope, then over a 30-meter rock cliff, landing in an icefall. The hut custodian was away most of the day and was not aware until the following morning that the couple had not returned from their climb; another climber at the hut set out up the Southeast Ridge

immediately, but saw no sign of the Parkers and returned after reaching the first peak. The custodian then descended to Lake O'Hara to summon help.

Banff Warden Service was contacted at 1600 Friday and conducted an unsuccessful helicopter search of the route that evening. When the search was resumed Saturday morning, some suspicious tracks on snow ledges of the east face almost 600 meters below the summit ridge led to the discovery of Mrs. Parker's body on the lower Victoria Glacier at the foot of the face. A snow storm hindered the search for Luc that afternoon. Bad weather continued Sunday, but two wardens left Lake O'Hara on foot to ascend Mt. Victoria. They turned back at the south summit because of poor conditions.

Monday, September 5 dawned clear, and several search teams were slung onto the mountain by helicopter to look for signs of Luc. At noon, with ideal light conditions, spotters positioned on nearby Mt. Lefroy picked out what looked like a sliding mark in the snow near the summit ridge of Mt. Victoria, and intensive helicopter investigation eventually led to the discovery of his body in a crevasse about 150 meters below the ridge.

Analysis

The Parkers had previous experience in the European Alps and had climbed several moderate rock and snow peaks in Banff Park just prior to this incident. They were well equipped for the climb, but conditions on Mt. Victoria were less than ideal on the day of their attempt. Another party turned back from the first peak the same day due to icy rock. The weather had been intermittently stormy over the previous days. At the time of the accident, they were wearing crampons, and the exact cause of their initial fall is not known. In any case, since the ridge at "The Sickle" is very narrow, a bad slip there exposes climbers immediately to the steep and smooth east face.

This horrendous chain of events was initially triggered by a simple slip and inability to self-arrest immediately. It is understandable why Eva chose to descend rather than try to regain the ridge. In the end, she was close to safety, but she must have been exhausted, and without her axe to steady herself, the final slope amounted to a trap. The conclusion of this story is especially tragic in that Eva was five months pregnant. (Source: Tim Auger, Banff National Park Warden Service)

FALL ON SNOW, AVALANCHE, POOR POSITION—SKI MOUNTAINEERING

British Columbia, Coast Mountains, Kitimat Range near Europa Lake

On May 21, 1994, five ski mountaineers were about two weeks into the traverse from Mussel Inlet to Gardner Canal. Four of them left their big packs, including an emergency locator transmitter, on a glacier with the fifth party member, and set off on a side trip to climb an unnamed 1860-meter peak south of the east end of Europa Lake. Not far from the summit, they reached a steep 15-meter step in the glacier, for which they briefly removed their skis to kick steps up hard snow to the more gentle slope above, where skis were again used for the short climb to the summit. After reaching the top, Randy S. (31) and John Clarke started down first, skiing toward the steep section. Following Randy to the top of it, John stopped to assess the situation, and saw Randy sliding down the slope below, in a sitting position, until he disappeared from view because of the convexity of the slope. John was alarmed, as he knew the slope ended in a cornice and Randy was almost certain to go over it. He removed his skis and climbed down to the lip, where he saw that Randy had fallen down a small cliff