

CANADA

AVALANCHE

Alberta, Banff National Park, Mount Wilson, Wilson Major

On January 10, J.W. (29) and J.S. (23) were approaching the ice climb Wilson Major on Mount Wilson. They had climbed up the WI III approach pitches of Lady Wilson's Cleavage and were traversing the steep snow slopes below Wilson Major when they triggered a slab avalanche and were swept down into the trees below. Neither was totally buried, but J.S. suffered a broken ankle from impact with a tree. J.W. wrapped J.S. up in blankets and descended to the Saskatchewan Crossing Warden Station where the district warden's wife was able to call for a Warden rescue team. J.S. was evacuated by heli-sling to a waiting ambulance.

Analysis

Avalanches are one of the major objective dangers to ice climbing in the Rockies. On some climbs the danger is just from avalanches sweeping down the waterfall from terrain above, but in many instances there are avalanche slopes that need to be crossed on the approach or descent route or on low angle sections that hold snow on the climb itself. There are numerous cases of ice climbing parties being involved in avalanches that they themselves triggered. It is not uncommon for ice climbers to travel without avalanche rescue gear such as beacons probes and shovels. In this instance the party triggered a slab on an early season deep instability of facets on crust. The weakness was well known throughout the ranges of Canada in the winter of 2003 and was the layer attributed to most of the fatal avalanches that occurred. It is not known what level of avalanche awareness the party had or if they were cognizant of the avalanche danger rating of "Considerable" in the area. This party was very fortunate that they did not suffer more serious injuries as the avalanche ran down over small cliffs and into mature timber. If there had been a total burial, neither had the gear to perform a self-rescue. It is common practice in avalanche terrain for one person to cross a suspect slope at a time while the other observes from an island of safety. (Source: Parks Canada Warden Service, Bradford White)

(Editor's Note: With skiers included, there have been 70 avalanche fatalities within the past five years.)

FALL ON ICE

Alberta, Banff National Park, Five Mile Creek, Mount Cory, Dumber

On January 19, D.B. and G.H. were top-roping an ice climb known as "Dumber" above Five Mile Creek on the east slopes of Mount Cory. While attempting to step up on his crampon after placing his tools, G.H.'s foot slipped and he smashed his knee against the ice and dislocated his kneecap. D.B. tied G.H. off and also placed an ice screw under each foot to ease the strain of hanging, he then descended to call for help from a place where