

AVALANCHE

Alberta, Banff National Park, Mount Rundle, Professor Falls

On March 23, a party of two was climbing Professor Falls (280 m. III WI4) and had just finished the technical lower pitches. They were walking roped together towards the last pitch. The second on the rope, T., heard a sound and looked up to see a large avalanche coming over the cliffs above. The two ran to the side of the gully and T. wrapped the rope around a tree a couple of times. The sky went dark gray and the avalanche poured over the two for what seemed like several minutes. T. could look back and see debris piling up where they had just been. The debris pile was over ten metres deep. After the slide stopped, the other member of the team, J., tried her cell and got through to Warden Dispatch. They reported the avalanche and the fact that there were at least three people below them on the waterfall. They then went to look down and determine what may have happened below. Wardens dispatched a helicopter and dog team and prepared for further rescue response. Meanwhile, J. called back on her cell and reported that she was in voice contact with the party of two beneath her and that they were only slightly dusted. J. indicated that they were descending a snow ramp where there had been an ice climb just minutes previously. By helicopter and cell communication, wardens were able to determine that all of the climbers on the route were accounted for and were descending.

Analysis

The avalanche was a Size Three, Natural Slab approximately 60 centimetres thick by 200 metres wide by 600 metres long. There had been no overnight freeze, the temperature was +10 EC at the base of the climb, there was light rain falling in the start zone, and the avalanche danger was rated as “Considerable rising to High with predicted daytime warming.” Ice climbs frequently form beneath large avalanche prone bowls. Above freezing temperatures and rain are two of the major contributing factors in ice-climbing avalanche incidents. (Source: Bradford White, Banff National Park Warden Service)

FALL INTO CREVASSE—UNROPED

Alberta, Jasper National Park, Mount Athabasca, North Glacier

On April 9, a party of three were ascending the North Glacier on Mount Athabasca on skis, on a route a little higher than where the “standard” route normally goes. Their intent was to do some skiing as they had done a week prior. At 1310, the party was paralleling a crevasse as they were nearing the top of a roll in the glacier, when K.F., who was in lead, dropped into the crevasse. The party was unroped, unharnessed, and unfortunately, K.F. had the rope. The two friends got as close as they safely could to the crevasse to try to establish contact, but no voice contact could be made. Knowing they could not do much without a