

FALL ON ROCK, HANDHOLD CAME OFF—FAILURE TO TEST HOLDS, UNROPED

Alberta, Waterdog, North D'art Area, Obliteration

On November 13, B.P. and T.M. were approaching the ice climb Obliteration (30 metre WI4) in the North Drywood area between Waterton National Park and Pincher Creek. The approach involves a 45-minute hike from the vehicles, followed by a moderate class 3 scramble in order to reach the base of the climb. The two climbed up through some easy cliff bands to a ledge below the falls and stopped to have a snack and decide which side to climb (Obliteration or The Gasser). They elected on Obliteration, so they put on their helmets and continued scrambling up the cliff bands with T.M. in the lead. Soon after, T.M. let out a holler and B.P. watched as T.M. fell backward past him. T.M. landed on his back, bounced, and then tumbled down the slope and over the cliff bands, falling approximately 100 feet before coming to rest on a steep scree slope above more cliff bands. As it turned out, a handhold that T.M. was using to pull himself up came loose, causing T.M. to fall backwards. While T.M. lay motionless, B.P. carefully down-climbed the cliff bands to reach T.M. As B.P. got closer, T.M. began to move. While still down climbing, B.P. tried to get T.M. to not move, fearing that T.M. might slip again and fall over more cliff bands. B.P. got below T.M. and began to assess his injuries. They determined that nothing was broken, but T.M. had some major bruising and a sprained ankle.

With the help of ski poles, B.P. and C.G., T.M. was able to walk out toward the truck. The 30-minute descent took approximately two hours. To B.P.'s knowledge, T.M. only suffered major bruising and a sprained ankle.

Analysis

The Waterton area is notorious for loose rock. B.P. noted that two things helped save T.M. from very serious injury. One was the 30 pound pack on his back and the other was his helmet. T.M. was lucky to have stopped where he did. If he had continued rolling and bouncing over the rest of the rock ledges it would have been a much more serious rescue. (Source: Dave Stephens)

FALL ON ICE, UNROPED

British Columbia, Haffner Creek Canyon

February 15, I.T. was solo climbing a mixed route in Haffner Creek Canyon to set up a top rope for friends. He was approximately twenty feet up when he slipped and fell to the ground landing at an awkward angle on his left ankle. Two ACMG guides that were working close by and witnessed the accident radioed Kootenay Park wardens to initiate a rescue response. I.T. was transported via heli-sling to the Haffner Creek trailhead. He was then evacuated by helicopter to the hospital in Banff. I.T. had fractured his ankle in three places.

Analysis

Solo climbing is unforgiving. Slips and even short falls while wearing crampons can lead to serious injuries. (Source: Percy Woods, Kootenay National Park Warden Service)

AVALANCHE, WEATHER

British Columbia, Yoho National Park, Mount Stephen, Super Bock

On March 6, three ice climbers were approaching the bottom pitch of a route called Super Bock (180 m. III WI5) on Mount Stephen in Yoho National Park. Two of the climbers were in a protected location near the base of pitch one; the third climber was approximately ten metres behind them. A wet avalanche poured down the route and swept the third climber approximately 300 metres down slope and into some sparse trees. He sustained a lower leg fracture and significant bruising. His friends quickly responded to his aid and one carried on down to the CPR tracks below and headed to the town of Field to report the accident. The reporting person was able to flag down an eastbound freight train. With assistance from the two CPR staff on board, the climbers were able to move the patient on to the train. They met an awaiting ambulance 1.5 kilometres up the rails.

Analysis

Temperatures had been above freezing for a few days with intermittent rain showers up as high as the avalanche start zones above Super Bock before the accident. Evidence of recent wet avalanches was apparent on adjacent slopes. Above freezing temperatures and rain are two of the major contributing factors in ice-climbing avalanche incidents. (Source: Percy Woods, Yoho National Park Warden Service)

CORNICE COLLAPSE, AVALANCHE

British Columbia, Yoho National Park, Mount Vice President

On April 9, an American man who was backcountry skiing in Yoho National Park died when he was swept away by an avalanche. Park wardens discovered the man's body at about 1800, buried under about 60 centimetres of snow. He had been skiing on the Vice President, a popular destination for backcountry skiing and mountaineering in the Little Yoho Valley. The victim was standing apart from his party on top of a cornice when it broke off. The human-triggered cornice failure produced a size three avalanche on an east aspect starting at 3100 metres and running full path. The slab stepped down to the rocks with the crown over a metre deep in some places. The victim was carried more than 600 metres down the mountain. The party, comprised of five or six members from both the U.S.A. and Canada, had a satellite phone and was able to call for help. Six wardens and two rescue dogs were called to the scene. A helicopter with an avalanche beacon suspended below it was used to locate the victim.