

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.

Analysis

At the time of the accident, the avalanche forecast was low but contained specific reference to increasing instability resulting from daytime warming. The forecast warned skiers that large cornices are starting to fall apart. This cornice failure occurred in the afternoon. The same day, a number of other natural avalanches were observed on sun-exposed slopes, demonstrating the deterioration of the snow pack that occurs in the afternoons with spring weather. In the spring, skiers are well advised to get up very early to enjoy the best conditions and finish their ski day early before afternoon warming creates isothermal conditions. (Source: Geneviève Svatek, Banff Crag and Canyon)

FALL INTO CREVASSSE, UNROPE

British Columbia, Glacier National Park, Deville Glacier

On May 6, B.E. (48) fell 60 feet to his death in a crevasse in the Selkirk Mountains while ski touring on the Deville Glacier in Glacier National Park. B.E. and four male friends from Canmore were traversing from Battle Abbey to Rogers Pass when the accident happened. The five skiers were doing a variation of the classic Bugaboos to Rogers Pass ski traverse, described in Chic Scott's book *Summits and Icefields* as one of the most magnificent in western Canada. It was a route the experienced B.E. had done twice before. The five had left Canmore on May 1, and were two days short of completing their week-long expedition when the accident occurred. B.E., who was in the lead, noticed the crevasse and when he went to check it for the safety of the group, he fell. A fellow climber rappelled down the crevasse to aid B.E., but he could not find a pulse. Two members of the party hiked down the mountain and contacted wardens by May 7, while two others stayed at the site. The two who stayed on the mountain were airlifted by helicopter, but recovery efforts for B.E. were stalled by weather until May 12.

Analysis

It is clear that the group had a rope, as one of the party rappelled down to the victim after the accident. What is not clear is why B.E. would choose to approach the crevasse to "check" on it without being roped up. (Source: Dave Stephens, Pam Doyle, Canmore Leader)

FALLING ROCK

British Columbia, Yoho National Park, Lake O'Hara, Abbott Pass

Two climbers were ascending the steep approach gullies to Abbott Pass from Lake O'Hara in Yoho National Park on July 25. They were packing heavy packs, planning a few days climbing from the hut at the pass. At 1730, one of them noticed a football sized rock coming towards them. He shouted a warning, but his partner (40) was not able to move in time. A.P. was struck