

them move down through the debris and away from the run-out zone. A heli-sling operation evacuated the climbers, equipment, and the wardens from the scene.

### **Analysis**

A wet spring with large snowfalls and heavy rains in June and early July created poor travel conditions and extended an alpine avalanche hazard into the normal climbing season. A rain-soaked snowpack combined with various thin crusts and wind-loading created a winter type of slab condition on some slopes. Warm overnight temperatures allowed for only a mild freeze.

While the two climbers had some sport climbing experience, this was their first season of alpine climbing. They did not recognize the avalanche hazard, and the warmer temperatures in the afternoon contributed to the avalanche release. The climbers were also unaware of the alternative descent route through the AA Col, which is much safer. (Source: Garth Lemke, Public Safety Warden Jasper National Park of Canada, Cathy Ellis)

## **FALL ON ROCK, HAND-HOLD BROKE OFF**

### **Alberta, Banff National Park, Lake Minnewanka Valley, Devils Gap, Macadamia**

On July 31, a 30-year-old climber suffered serious injuries after falling 40 feet while leading Macadamia (5.9) near Devil's Gap in Banff National Park Sunday afternoon. The accident left the climber with a serious lower leg fracture and a crushed hand. Banff rescue wardens were flown to the scene. Alpine Helicopters flew him to Banff's Mineral Springs Hospital and later to a Calgary hospital.

### **Analysis**

Spontaneous rockfall and hold failure is common in the Rockies because of the nature of the rock in combination with the winter melt and freeze conditions. Climbers should be alert for rockfall and holds should be tested before fully weighting them. (Source: Marc Ledwidge, Banff National Park Warden, and Cathy Ellis, *Rocky Mountain Outlook*)

## **FALL ON ICE**

### **Alberta, Kananaskis Country, 2-Low 4-Zero**

On December 3, I took a leader fall. The fall was a result of a left-hand tool plant shearing off a substantial block of very brittle ice while I was placing the other tool. The left tool proceeded to hit me in the mouth with some velocity, breaking a front incisor in half and causing a puncture wound on my lower lip. More importantly, the force of this hit caused me to lose my footholds, which were pretty good, resulting in a free-fall of four to five meters. The crampon on my right foot caught, severely spraining my ankle. I fell on a section that was largely vertical to overhanging below me, so I did not hit the ice with much force. I was leading on two ropes above a three-

screw belay that I had set up maybe 40 meters off the ground. The force of the fall pulled my wife off her feet and against the anchors. (I weigh well over 200 pounds fully laden). I was suspended head down, pulled myself up, and placed a screw to clip off. I managed to climb up a few feet to retrieve an intermediate screw, then with some difficulty due to thin ice, set up an Abalakov with a “leaver” screw backup. Due to the sprained ankle I did not feel confident climbing back up to retrieve the screw, so I pulled the rope through, set up a double rope rap through the Abalakov, and rapped down. My wife rapped the same rig.

I did not feel the need for an evacuation. I was not critically injured, and although it is a substantial walk in to this climb, it is a largely easy trail. Additionally, we each had a ski pole, so with my wife carrying a heavier pack (bless her heart) and me using both poles, I was able to manage, albeit slowly. My feet were already somewhat cold due to the low temperatures, and I tightened the boot ankle on the injured foot, so it wasn't too painful.

I checked over and had the ankle X-rayed at the Canmore Hospital. The good news is that nothing was broken. The result was not being able to climb for several weeks due to damage to the ankle, and a broken tooth that could be fixed without a root canal. Very lucky, but a wake-up call.

### **Analysis**

I was using Mammut Genesis 8.5 ropes. Probably the high degree of stretch on a single strand of skinny rope contributed to the lack of failure. There was little tension on the second strand. I had placed a stubby about three meters below the top screw, plus there was a screw about 1.5 meters above the belay. The belay was bomber—a stubby, an 18-cm, and a 22-cm R.C.L.

Lessons? Well, don't climb when it is close to minus 20 C. The ice can become particularly brittle. Additionally, this was a cold snap after a period of very warm temps, which probably contributed to chossy (sic) ice. Although I was on a climb that was well within my leading abilities and I wasn't having any particular difficulty, it was a bit hard to find good plants, and I was knocking off some big chunks. Under such conditions, additional care is obviously warranted. Plus, it just isn't very pleasant.

Although we had plenty of good clothing, if I had been more seriously injured and a rescue had been necessary, the clothing we had may have been insufficient to hold off hypothermia. We should have been carrying an additional insulating layer.

Ski poles are gold in the event of an injury. Walking out on my own accord would otherwise have been very difficult. This was my first (and hopefully last) leader fall on water ice. This is my eighth season water ice climbing. Although I have done quite a bit of soloing on easy water ice, this experience has cured me of that. I would have surely died without a rope. I was quite impressed with the holding power of the screw and belay chain, even

in less than perfect ice. It also demonstrated the power of a good belayer and keeping cool heads. (Source: Edited from a report submitted to the website called Live-the-vision.com, name unknown)

## **FALL ON ICE**

### **Alberta, Jasper National Park, Mount Kerkeslin, Kerkeslin Falls**

On December 30, a party of two was climbing Kerkeslin Falls (III, 3), a moderate waterfall ice route in Jasper National Park. The leader was ascending the third and final pitch when he took a short fall. The ice screw that he had placed below him held. However, he fell onto lower angled ice below, resulting in a fracture of the lower leg. His belayer lowered him to a large ledge at the bottom of the pitch. Another party of three helped secure him and administered first aid. Two members of the second party descended the route and called for assistance. A warden service rescue team was dispatched and the injured climber and the other two remaining climbers were heli-slung off the climb just before dark.

### **Analysis**

This accident illustrates how serious even a small fall on ice while wearing crampons can be. The injured party was lucky that a second group of experienced climbers were on the route and were able to descend quickly and call for help. If this were not the case, it seems likely that the injured party would have spent the night out before being rescued. (Source: Parks Canada Warden Service)

## **SLIP ON SNOW, EXCEEDING ABILITIES, INADEQUATE CLOTHING AND EQUIPMENT, NO HARD HAT, CLIMBING ALONE**

### **British Columbia, Mount Robson Provincial Park, Base of Mount Robson**

On May 23, M.S. and D.B. were camping at the Kinney Lake Campground. M.S. told D.B. he was going to “do some scrambling on the cliffs and gullies overlooking the campground” and would be back before dark. He never returned that evening. D.B. located the local rangers and reported him overdue. At first light, the rangers conducted a hasty search and found boot tracks about 800 meters above Kinney Lake in a snow gully. An RCMP helicopter subsequently located M.S. below a cliff in a gully. The Jasper Warden Service was dispatched and heli-slung the deceased climber out.

### **Analysis**

M.S. was inexperienced in this terrain, had inappropriate footwear, lacked appropriate equipment (i.e. no ice ax for self arresting and no helmet), and was by himself. He likely slipped while on the snow slopes above the cliffs and subsequently slid and fell off a 30-plus-meter cliff. He likely did not survive this initial fall. He probably did not recognize the hazard of his posi-