

*Editor's Note:* This accident does not include in its analysis a cause or a "holding responsible" of an individual. Having read various reports and talked with individuals who were there, I can only at this time raise questions for the future. One, what are the limits of reasonable precaution? Two, to what extent is a guide accountable in exercising control over a client or clients? (The latter becomes trickier when unroped.) Three, while in this particular instance it might have made no difference, would it not be appropriate for individuals carrying electronic locating instruments to be on the same frequency with all others who are within a reasonable radius? Hopefully, these matters will be resolved by guides rather than legislation.

**NO HARDHAT OR CLIMBING HARNESS—British Columbia, Coast Range, Mt. Waddington.** A party of eight persons, most of them members of the British Columbia Mountaineering Club, was packing 50-pound loads up to high camp for Mt. Waddington. Atop the Bravo Glacier there is a thin ridge to be walked. This featured a soft cornice on one side and a small rock ledge on the other. The party was roped into four teams, with two to a rope. About midday on 31 July 1974, the party was climbing this ledge, belaying. On fourth rope was Peter Womble, leading, and Graham Nourse (26). None of the eight was wearing a hardhat, although they had been worn the day before on high-angle rock and were being carried for the final tower of Waddington. Nourse fell off the ledge and was held by Womble's belay, but he pendulumed 50 feet into a rock wall. He suffered internal injuries (at the waist caused by the rope) and a fatal skull fracture. Nourse did not die immediately, but first aid failed to keep him alive. His body was secured by the party and recovered in hazardous conditions after three attempts by helicopter five days later. (Sources: Dick Culbert and newspaper account of coroner's jury hearing.)

*Analysis:* Although reasonably experienced, there were indications that Nourse was not comfortable in this difficult terrain with a heavy pack. This is difficult to judge in retrospect, however, as the accident was caused by a simple slip that could happen to anyone. If Nourse had been wearing his hardhat and a chest harness, he may well have escaped serious injury. (Sources: Dick Culbert, James Prior.)

**CHOCK FAILURE AND POOR QUALITY HELMET—British Columbia, Mt. Victoria.** On 26 June 1974, Blair Mitten (21), an experienced climber who was a student in the Assistant Guides Course sponsored by the Association of Canadian Mountain Guides, was leading a mixed class 5 and easier pitch on the south side of Mt. Victoria. He was carrying a heavy pack and was apparently tied at the waist. He had placed one chock when he fell. This protection point held long enough to flip him upside down before it pulled out, allowing him to fall a considerable distance.

Mitten was wearing a standard Roamer helmet, but he sustained severe head injury. The webbing collapsed and transferred the force so completely that the extent of skull damage was not perceived from the condition of the hardhat. It is likely that paralysis on one side of his body was interpreted as a broken arm and/or leg. He was given a pain medicine, Demerol, which was a serious mistake given his head injury.

The victim was then evacuated from the accident site by Assistant Guides Course personnel, who then turned the victim over to an army unit. Mitten was taken to the Banff hospital and then rushed to Calgary, where he was in coma for five days. This was followed by a lengthy recovery from partial paralysis and loss of

memory. The Assistant Guides Course did not inform the victim's parents about the accident and only considerably later answered their letters inquiring about their son. (Source: Dick Culbert.)

*Analysis:* First, since the climber was carrying a heavy pack on a technical pitch, he should have been tied in with a chest harness. Second, a properly placed chock should be at least as strong as a piton. However, since chocks are placed rather than pounded, they can be less secure. This defect can be compensated for by frequent placement and long slings. Third, reliable mountaineering outlets do not sell poor quality helmets. This accident demonstrates the narrowness of the philosophy that "any helmet is better than no helmet at all." A helmet should be judged not only by the strength of the shell, but by its ability to absorb shock from the side and the top, and to stay on the head in a fall. (Source: James Prior.)

*AVALANCHE IN A BOWL—Yukon, St. Elias Mountains, The Weisshorn.* After having climbed Mt. Hubbard and Mt. Kennedy, the Polish Mountain Expedition *Alaska 1974* set out to climb the virgin peak, the Weisshorn, and nearby peaks for one of which they planned to propose the name, *Mt. Poland*. They had supplied their high base camp at the 8300-foot level on the Cathedral Glacier by helicopter from their main base camp at Mile 1022 on the Alaska Highway, where they had set up a sophisticated amateur radio station, SP9PT/VE8.

After several days of bad weather spent in high base camp, good weather on 28 August prompted the team, Henryk Furmanik (leader), Adam Bilczewski, Adam Zyzak, Janusz Baranek and Krzysztof Tomaszewski, to start. Jerzy Kalla remained at high base camp to relay radio communications between the climbing team and the helicopter patrolling the area. After traveling down the Cathedral Glacier for about a mile, the climbing team turned left, crossed the ice fall, and reached the bowl under the west slope of the Weisshorn in the afternoon. The entire route from high base camp to the bowl was wanded and hourly radio contact was maintained with Kalla during the day. Since the weather was good and it was relatively early in the day, the team decided to try for the unclimbed peak approximately 1500 feet above them just to the southwest of the Weisshorn by the northeast ice flank. At first the terrain was easy but progress was slow due to the softness of the snow. In the middle of the ice flank, there were some technical difficulties and considering the approach of evening, it was decided to try again the next morning. Furmanik, Bilczewski and Tomaszewski returned to the bottom of the bowl and prepared a bivouac in a narrow depression about ten feet deep surrounding a single ice block about 15 feet in diameter. Zyzak and Baranek made a visual reconnaissance of the eastern ridge of the same peak and the south ridge of the Weisshorn, establishing that these two ridges were the easiest approaches to the summits; they then descended to the common bivouac. Furmanik, Bilczewski and Tomaszewski slept on the south side of the ice block, while Zyzak and Baranek chose the west side of the block. The night was beautiful with light frost and there was no wind.

About 7:30 a.m. on 29 August, a great ice barrier block above severed and caused a great avalanche of snow blocks and loose snow. Bilczewski saw it coming and he immediately shouted to the others and retreated to the north side of the ice block. Baranek and Zyzak, though hindered by their anoraks, crawled about ten feet around to the same side of the block. The front of the avalanche was about 30 feet high and it seemed to have stopped; but then the lower part was pressed forward and Zyzak, Baranek and Bilczewski found themselves in a six-foot wide