

CANADA

(1980)

AVALANCHE

Alberta, Rocky Mountains, Mount Athabasca

On August 30, 1980, Glen Parker (26), Dolores Parker (20), and Roy Walter (18) were ascending the normal route (north glacier, saddle, north ridge) on Mount Athabasca. They were roped together with G. Parker in the lead and Walter last. A slab fracture occurred below G. Parker, about halfway up a steep snow slope leading toward the saddle. He attempted to hold with his ice ax, but it pulled out and they were all carried down by the avalanche. When it stopped, G. Parker and D. Parker were on the surface but Walter had been swept into a crevasse and buried under about six feet of snow.

Two other climbers starting to climb the Silverhorn Arête came to help and Walter was uncovered after about 20 minutes. Two of the climbers then set out to report the accident and obtain further help. In spite of attempts at resuscitation, which started as soon as his head had been cleared and continued for two and a half hours, the victim could not be revived. (Source: D. A. Dumpleton, Jasper National Park; G. Parker, S. Davis, and S. Wyatt)

Analysis

There were eight to ten inches of fresh snow, slab conditions, and a running surface of old compacted snow. The fracture line was 60 feet long and 12 inches high on a 35-degree slope. The slide was triggered by the climbers. Shovels would have speeded the digging. (Source: D. A. Dumpleton, Jasper National Park)

FALL ON ROCK, FAILURE OF PITON, CLIMBING ALONE

Alberta, Rocky Mountains, Mount Alberta

Tobin Sorenson (25) was attempting to climb the north face of Mount Alberta alone. He started on October 3, 1980; his last diary entry was 9:15 p.m. on October 4. By this time, he had made it above the ice onto the rock face. He fell some time on October 5.

He was using figure-eight knots every ten feet on his rope for self-belay. A piton and carabiner were attached to one of the loops. He must have fallen into the belay piton which then pulled, because the knot was tight and could not be opened, while all the other knots were normal.

A search was started when Sorenson did not return on the date indicated on his registration—October 7 at 7:00 p.m. Although his camp was located at 3:00 p.m. on October 8, the helicopter was stranded at the 9,600-foot level for three and a half hours because of storms. At 8:30 a.m. on October 9 the search was resumed; the body was located on the glacier at the base of the north face around 10:00 a.m. The rescue was completed by 1:00 p.m. (Source: D. A. Dumpleton, Jasper National Park)

Analysis

Sorenson had climbed a number of extremely difficult mountains, including a solo winter