

HYPOTHERMIA, HEART FAILURE

Baffin Island, Auyuittuq National Park

On August 25, 1985, a man (42) was hiking alone. What transpired during the day is not known, but when he arrived at Overlord Campground in the evening, he was wet, shivering, and had difficulty walking. A group of hikers who was also camped there took him to an emergency shelter, had him remove his wet clothing, and provided him with a sleeping bag. They took his temperature, finding it to be 35.5°C (37°C is normal). They provided him with soup and heated the cabin. His temperature rose to 38°C, and he complained of pain in his right leg which was cut and bruised. The next morning at 0900, it was reported to park staff that the hiker was sleeping comfortably. At 1000, he was reported dead. (Source: R. Breneman, Auyuittuq National Park Reserve)

Analysis

The post mortem examination attributed the hiker's death to systemic hypothermia with the mechanism of death being heart failure. General circulatory failure is not usually encountered until body temperature is much lower than 35.5°C. Had the hiker not been alone, a companion might have been able to provide assistance. (Source: R. Breneman, Auyuittuq National Park Reserve)

(Editor's note: Although the person was hiking rather than climbing, this account is published to document a possible outcome of traveling alone in a remote mountainous area.)

FALLING ROCK

Alberta, Rocky Mountains, Mount Redoubt

On August 25, 1985, three highly experienced climbers were ascending a chimney on the west face of Mt. Redoubt. About 12 meters above a belay station, the leader dislodged a large boulder, raining rocks and debris on the two below. The leader fell about three meters onto his protection and was held by the belayer. Both persons at the belay were hit by falling rock and sustained injuries. (Source: Warden Service, Banff National Park))

Analysis

This accident demonstrates the susceptibility of even highly experienced climbers to the dangerous effects of the instability of rock found throughout the Canadian Rockies. Experience, judgment, and the use of safe climbing techniques do not always guarantee protection from objective hazards. (Source: Warden Service, Banff National Park)

FAILURE TO FOLLOW ROUTE, FALL ON ROCK, CLIMBING ALONE

British Columbia, Coast Mountains, Garibaldi Provincial Park

On September 1, 1985, two hikers left Black Tusk Meadows to scramble up Black Tusk (2200 meters). The night before, they had seen a Parks Branch film about the summit, which stressed that the only safe way was up a chimney at the west end of the main face. When they reached it, one of them decided it was too steep, and the other (40) went up alone. Descending, he took a wrong turn from the summit, and wound up on the steep, dangerously loose South Face. He fell 12 meters into a narrow gully, fracturing his skull, an arm, and a leg, and suffering other injuries.

A climber reached him in an hour, and sent hikers to the rangers' cabin. A helicopter came with a doctor on board. The victim, still unconscious, was attached by slings to a fixed cable under the helicopter and flown to hospital. (Source: Paddy Sherman, Ottawa)

Analysis

The Black Tusk is an easily-accessible climb which is an easy Class 3, if you find the right route. But if you miss it, either ascending or descending, you're onto horribly loose Class 5. (Source: Ian Kay, West Vancouver)

(Editor's Note: While this is not counted as a climbing accident, it is an example of a hiker finding himself unprepared in climbing territory.)

FALL ON ICE, EQUIPMENT FAILURE

British Columbia, Rocky Mountains, Mount Field

At 1230 on December 31, 1985, two experienced ice climbers (39 and 30) were ascending Silk Tassel waterfall. They were about 15 meters up the ice route, when the leader (38) fell three meters above his protection. The belay failed after a six meter fall because of breakage of the back shaft of the carabiner (Salewa hollow oval, 1400 kg test). The lead climber continued to fall to the base of the waterfall, landing on his feet and causing a multiple fracture of his right ankle. His companion reported the accident to the warden office, and the injured climber was slung out by helicopter. (Source: E. Langshaw, Yoho National Park Warden Service)