

FALLING ROCK, FAILURE TO TEST HOLDS

Alberta, Rocky Mountains, Mount Cory

On July 28, 1986, two climbers of intermediate experience (early 30s) had completed the steepest part of an eight-pitch climb called Clockwork Orange and were ascending moderate cracks on lower-angled terrain. At 1800, the leader dislodged a large limestone block which fell a short distance and broke the belayer's leg.

The leader anchored his partner on the belay ledge, and rappelled off the cliff to obtain help. The injured climber was slung off the mountain by helicopter at dusk. (Source: Banff National Park Warden Service)

Analysis

Mount Cory consists of good limestone, and the climbers were following cracks in solid slabs. The leader tried to use a loose block for a hold, an unfortunate choice in a place where safer holds were probably available. (Source: Banff National Park Warden Service)

FAILURE OF RAPPEL ANCHOR, INADEQUATE PROTECTION

Alberta, Rocky Mountains, Mount Whyte

On August 2, 1986, J.B. (52) and M.O. (35), both experienced climbers, were descending the northwest ridge of Mount Whyte. Around 1530, when they were about 100 meters above the col, J.B. decided to rappel a steep west-facing wall, while M.O. decided to downclimb the pitch. J.B. used a rock pinnacle on the ridge as a belay anchor. He was just beginning his rappel when the pinnacle failed. After he fell and tumbled about 30 vertical meters down broken cliffs and ledges, his rope snagged, stopping the fall. He luckily sustained only numerous cuts and bruises and damaged ligaments in his right knee.

M.O. made him comfortable and then went for help. The injured climber was evacuated by a Parks Canada rescue crew later that evening. (Source: Clair Israelson, Banff National Park Warden Service)

Analysis

Extreme caution should be exercised when selecting natural rappel anchors, as rappel anchor failures usually have fatal results. The anchor should have been thoroughly tested prior to belaying the rappel. (Source: Clair Israelson, Banff National Park Warden Service)

FALLING ICE, POOR POSITION

Alberta, Rocky Mountains, Mount Temple

On August 3 or 4, 1986, a party of two was climbing the North Face of Mount Temple. Climbing conditions and weather were excellent, with clear skies and moderate temperatures. The route was in excellent condition.

The climbers ascended the snow and ice Dolphin to the traverse ledge at 3000 meters elevation. They then followed the ledge well past the north ridge, to a point near the center of the bowl below the icefall. Tracks found near their highest point suggest that they were attempting to climb diagonally up and left toward easier ground to the east.