

FALL ON ROCK

Alberta, Rocky Mountains, Mount Ishbel

On October 5, 1987, a party of two climbed the finger on Mount Ishbel. On the descent, one of the climbers tripped on an untied shoelace, causing him to tumble down steep Class 4 terrain, severely cutting his knee and bruising his hip. Unable to walk, he spent a cold night out while his partner went for help. The injured climber was slung out by helicopter the following morning by the Banff National Park Warden Service. (Source: Banff National Park Warden Service)

Analysis

Both of the climbers were experienced, and this section of the descent is normally downclimbed unroped. At the time of the accident, dusk was rapidly approaching, and haste may have been a contributing factor. It is difficult to be a mountain goat with your shoes untied! (Source: Banff National Park Warden Service)

FALLING CORNICE, AVALANCHE

British Columbia, Rocky Mountains, Mount Bryce

On the afternoon of June 13, 1987, a party of four left the Columbia Icefields Centre for a series of climbs. The climbers were three captains (25, 24, 27) and a corporal (26) in the British army. They were in Alberta for military exercises, but the climbing they were doing now was recreational. Traveling up the Athabaska Glacier to above the third icefall, they set up camp that evening below Snow Dome. The following day the group left at 1130 and traveled to Mount Bryce, a 3500 meter peak just inside British Columbia, which they apparently thought was Mount Columbia two kilometers to the north. They reached Mount Bryce in the early evening and began to ascend the east flank of the northeast ridge.

Around 2000, while they were ascending an hourglass-shaped snow couloir which led onto the crest of the northeast ridge, the cornice above them broke. The falling cornice triggered the snow slope on which they were climbing, and carried three of the four climbers away. The remaining climber (the corporal) had been in the lead, and had just set up a belay station on top of the bordering left-hand buttress of the couloir when the avalanche occurred. The belay rope (9 mm) broke when he tried to arrest the fall of his partner.

After the avalanche, the corporal observed one of his mates on the surface of the debris but felt incapable of climbing down to him. Instead, he descended down the opposite side of the northeast ridge where the terrain appeared to be less technical. He descended into Bryce Creek and onto logging roads where after 14 hours of walking he was picked up by a logging truck at 1040 the following day and driven to Golden, B.C., where he reported the accident. (Source: Jasper National Park Warden Service, and *Banff Crag and Canyon*, June 17, 1987)

Analysis

Slab avalanches in high alpine areas are common in June. Most of the snow has melted off the southerly mountain slopes, but there are still a lot of avalanches on the northerly aspects. On this occasion, cornices and snowpacks were unstable because of warm daytime temperatures. Before entering the couloir, the climbers had noticed