

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

cornices falling off in other locations. A late start and inadequate route research may have contributed to the accident. The surviving climber had little mountaineering experience, but the others had climbed in the Alps, the Himalayas, and in South America. (Source: J. Israelson, Jasper National Park Warden Service)

FALL ON SNOW, UNABLE TO SELF-ARREST, INEXPERIENCE

British Columbia, Rocky Mountains, Mount Assiniboine

On July 25, 1987, two climbers, one novice (23), the other with some experience (about 23), left Magog Lake to climb to the Hind Hut on Mount Assiniboine. Around noon, they were at the lower headwall of the mountain, above Magog Lake. The novice climber, Charlie, wanted to practice walking on crampons, so the other climber selected a steep snowfield to go up. Charlie had his crampons on first, so the other climber told him to "walk up there" while he finished putting his own crampons on.

When Charlie was about 40 meters up, he turned to see where his companion was, and to ask him how to get down. On turning, he lost his footing, and began sliding rapidly down on his seat and hands. As he didn't know how to self-arrest, he lost his ice ax immediately and tried to jam his right crampon in the hard packed snow as a brake. It caught, and instantly broke his ankle. Then he tried to gently use his left crampon as a brake, but it didn't work, and he slid onto the rocks (scree) below, injuring his left ankle and suffering minor cuts on his hand and one leg.

When the park rangers were notified, one ranger quickly went to the accident site with first-aid supplies. About four hours later, the injured climber was rescued by helicopter and sling during a hailstorm. (Source: G. MacRae, Mount Assiniboine Provincial Park, and Banff Park Warden Service)

Analysis

The climber had not worn crampons before and did not know how to self-arrest. If he had known how to self-arrest, he would have faced the snow and very likely had no difficulty. Nylon wind pants probably contributed to his rapid acceleration. (Source: G. MacRae, Mount Assiniboine Provincial Park, and Banff Park Warden Service)

STRANDED, INADEQUATE EQUIPMENT, WEATHER

British Columbia, Rocky Mountains, Mount Robson

On July 24, 1987, a party of three attempted to climb and descend the Wishbone Arête in one day. They were attempting a lightweight climb, carrying no stove or sleeping bags and only enough food for one day. They left the hut at 1600 and were spotted by a group of climbers descending the mountain that evening. They were reported overdue on July 26 at 1000. Rescuers found them exhausted on a rock part of their descent route. (Source: Jasper National Park Warden Service)

Analysis

The climbers had no North American mountaineering experience. They had climbed three moderately difficult peaks before attempting Mount Robson. They seriously underestimated the severity of the climb, and had an inadequate supply of provisions and bivouac equipment. They were climbing in deteriorating weather as well. (Source: Jasper National Park Warden Service)