

*(Editor's Note: This is not an accident which happened to a climber. Cascade Mountain is a prominent peak close to the Trans-Canada Highway and close to the Banff townsite. It has often been the scene of hikers or scramblers wandering into rock climbing situations.)*

## **FAILURE OF RAPPEL—FAILURE TO CHECK SYSTEM**

### **British Columbia, Squamish, Smoke Bluffs**

On May 28, 1989, Deborah Richards and I were finishing up three days of climbing in the Squamish area. I had just finished a lead on Cat's Crack (5.7 or 5.8, not sure). Deborah wanted to top rope Pink Flamingo which is easily accessed by rappelling off the ledge below. I set up the anchors for the rope. We had a bombproof tree to anchor to, but I decided to set up a safety anchor (just to keep practicing safe climbing techniques) and I *know* how dangerous rappelling is.

Anyway, Deborah went down first, after we checked her rappel set up. I agreed to go second as I had been climbing more than she that spring and was having a great day. After Deborah was through, I rechecked the anchors and put on the pack to bring down the gear. My helmet was hanging from the back of my pack. I decided at the last minute to put it on because I didn't want it flopping around, and rappelling *is* dangerous. I looped the rope through my figure-eight, locked my locking carabiner and began backing down the face. About two meters into the rappel, I noticed one strand of my rope being quickly pulled over my head. I grabbed for it to stop it, but I was already falling. I remember bouncing three times and being certain I would die, as people don't survive 20 meters plus free falls.

My helmet was seriously damaged. I have no doubt that it saved my life, while wearing the pack minimized the severity of my injuries. (They were severe enough with it.) Please tell people to wear their helmets. I kept mine in the hospital with me for a month on my IV stand and plan to have it bronzed! I just had put mine on at the last second. I regret to say I had done many rappels the weekend of the fall without it.

My shoulder, which received one of 13 total fractures, is permanently damaged, but I am still planning to climb. As of today, I have rappelled again and done a little top roping. I need to get the rod out of my leg before I lead again. Fortunately, my orthopedist climbs and has been most supportive during a tough rehabilitation period. Deborah does not want to climb again as a result of this accident. (Source: Shawn Kenderdine, 37)

### **Analysis**

It was really difficult to figure out what happened. Rescue workers checked the anchors and they were fine; my harness was fine and the locking 'biner was locked, but the rope was pulled down and still connected to my 'biner. After talking to highly experienced climbers and setting up the system as it was that day, what appears to have happened is that I clipped only one of the rope loops through my my locking carabiner instead of both. This would account for the strand of rope moving very quickly above me and the fact that the rope was still attached to it after the fall. (It was completely pulled down with me.)

I have been climbing for seven years and am known to be careful and very safety conscious. I don't know how I could have changed it. I will always check three times to make sure both rope loops are in the locking 'biner. I checked twice and that wasn't enough. This was an easy error to make. I'm surprised it hasn't happened more.

One more thing: we could have scrambled down but the downclimbing has one

scary move, which could result in a possible three-meter fall.

Sorry this is so late. It is very difficult to write about this stuff, even though I am a Ph.D. psychologist with four years of experience dealing with trauma victims). (Source: Shawn Kenderdine)

### **FALL ON ROCK, CLIMBING SOLO, NO HARD HAT, INEXPERIENCE**

#### **British Columbia, Rocky Mountains, Mount Wardle**

On June 23, 1989, Ben (21) and his brother Uli (23) decided to make an attempt to climb Mount Wardle via the East Face. After completing a very difficult bushwhack to reach the base of the climb, they worked their separate ways to the bottom of the face. Uli, who had gotten onto a ridge, hurt his ankle and decided to turn around and head back to camp, leaving his brother who wanted to continue on.

This was the last time Uli saw his brother alive. Ben continued on until he was about three quarters of the way up the face. It was at this point that he fell 300 meters to his death, ending up near the bottom of the face. The next morning, Uli notified the Kootenay Park Warden Service that his brother had not returned. The Warden Service used a Parks Rescue helicopter to sling in to the site and remove Ben's body. (Source: Kootenay National Park Warden Service)

#### **Analysis**

Neither brother had done more than a little rock climbing. They were climbing in running shoes with no rope or other protection. The bottom part of the East Face of Mount Wardle is easy climbing, but as one gets higher on the face, the climb increases in difficulty, tending to lure an inexperienced climber into a position from which it is hard to downclimb. The fall may have been caused by rockfall or by an attempt to downclimb. (Source: Kootenay National Park Warden Service)

### **FALL INTO CREVASSE, CLIMBING UNROPED**

#### **British Columbia, Bugaboo Mountains, Bugaboo Spire**

On September 13, 1989, while crossing the Crescent Glacier after climbing the Kain Route on Bugaboo Spire, John Ulricson (45) fell ten meters onto a snow bridge in a crevasse. I was traveling behind, carrying a rope. After about 30 minutes of work, John was out of the hole, but not without some dramatic moments. (Source: T. J. English (43), Hopewell, NJ)

#### **Analysis**

After seeing many other climbers traverse this short stretch of glacier unroped on a well established snow trail, we did not give the matter much thought. Normally, when we crossed glaciers, we roped up, but in this case we assumed Crescent was a benign glacier. Obviously this was not the case.

Additional Comments: John was wearing his helmet, parka, and harness. The helmet protected him on impact, the parka kept him from getting hypothermic, and the harness allowed him to securely tie in the rope from above.