

Analysis

Climbing Mount Assiniboine had been the victim's ambition for some time. He had worked hard to become prepared and fit, and intended to retire from climbing after this ascent. His slip was great caution. (Source: T. Auger, Warden Service, Banff National Park)

FALL ON SNOW, ROPED BUT NOT BELAYED, INEXPERIENCE

British Columbia, Rocky Mountains, Mount Robson

At approximately 1230 on August 21, 1990, Kofler and Herbst (30) were descending from the summit of Mount Robson. Herbst fell and slid down the southwest side of the ridge they were on, pulling Kofler off. Both fell approximately 75 meters, flying over a crevasse and hitting the bottom edge, which stopped them. Kofler sustained a broken ankle, Herbst had facial cuts and a black eye. Kofler lost his ice ax, and Herbst lost one crampon.

A party of two climbers, Guerra and Glick, who were ascending the summit ridge, met another party, Stefanoff and Warner, who were descending and heard cries for help from Kofler and Herbst, above. Guerra and Glick assisted the injured climbers to a bivy site in a bergschrund at the top of the Kain Face, southeast ridge. Stefanoff and Warner descended to get help.

Two mountain guides, Blanchard and Kirwin, who were camped at the base of the Kain Face with three clients, ascended to the bivy site with supplies after hearing about the accident from Stefanoff and Warner. The guides then descended to their clients while the remaining four climbers spent the night at the bivy.

Jasper National Park Warden Service received information about the accident late on the day it occurred, and dispatched a helicopter and rescue team the following morning, August 22. The same morning Glick and Guerra attempted to descent but were turned back by heavy snow and whiteout conditions, as a major storm had moved in overnight.

Bad weather made it impossible for the helicopter to reach the injured party; however, at 1610, a small window opened up at 3200 meters below the injured party. At 2000, the helicopter was able to drop off a radio at Blanchard and Kirwin's camp at the bottom of the Kain Face (on the side opposite from Little Robson). Shortly after that, they ascended the Kain Face, arriving at the injured party's bivy site at 2230. The decision was made to move them down the Kain Face immediately because the forecast was for the weather to deteriorate further. They reached the lower camp four hours later, at 0230, August 23.

At 1340 on August 23, the helicopter picked up the injured climbers at the camping area below the Kain Face.

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Aside from the fall, this accident resulted primarily from inexperience. Kofler and Herbst had taken only one climbing school together. They were not prepared either in ability or equipment for a climb as rigorous as Mount Robson. Proper belay techniques on steep terrain and the ability to self-arrest are essential skills for such a climb. A severe storm that suddenly struck Mount Robson complicated the rescue. It was very fortunate that Kofler and Herbst encountered experienced mountaineers to assist them in their predicament. (Source: Rick Ralf, Canadian Parks Service, Jasper)