

climbers in three different parties were evacuated from the route over a two-day period. Another party of two completed the route without incident during the same time. Busy place! (Source: Marc Ledwidge, Banff National Park Warden Service)

ROCKFALL, LATE START

Alberta, Rocky Mountains, Mount Lefroy

A party of two left Abbot Pass hut at 0900, August 14, 1994, to climb the snow and ice gullies of the standard West Face route on Mt. Lefroy (3423 meters). Partway up the route, a large rockfall occurred. Both climbers were struck and sustained minor injuries. They returned to the hut and sent someone for help. One of them was evacuated by helicopter later in the day, to the hospital in Banff. He was treated for minor back injuries and later released.

Analysis

Alpine snow and ice faces are subject to rockfall, particularly when the temperature rises. A predawn start is common practice for such a route, and would have been especially advisable at that time, as daytime temperatures were reaching record highs and overnight freezing was minimal. (Source: Marc Ledwidge, Banff National Park Warden Service)

RAPPEL ERROR—HASTE

Alberta, Rocky Mountains, Cowbell Crag

One Sunday morning in August, 1994, Phil M. went climbing at Cowbell Crag with his less-experienced friends Irf and Shakil. After climbing for two hours, they were descending a 50-meter face the last time in order for Phil to get to work at 1400. Phil rappelled to a ledge about ten meters above the ground, and Shakil was waiting at the top anchor for his turn. Shakil was not completely familiar with the procedure, so Phil was coaching him from the ledge 40 meters below, and Shakil started pulling up the ropes. After a couple of minutes, Phil realized the confusion could be dangerous, so he decided to descend to the base and then hike 'up the back' to oversee Shakil's rappel. To get down, Phil could traverse and downclimb easily, or climb straight down with the rappel rope for a belay, or get back on the rope and rappel the last 10 meters. Alternatively, he could climb the pitch one last time with a belay from his friend at the top. He decided to rappel, but unknown to him, a length of the rope had accumulated and snagged above while Shakil was preparing to descend. Phil clipped it into his descender and stepped to the edge. As soon as he weighted the rope, the snag came free and he fell to the ground, striking a ledge on the way, and ended up sitting on the approach trail six meters from the base of the cliff with broken ribs and a gash at the base of his skull. (Source: George Field, Alpine Specialist, Kananaskis Country)

Analysis

Phil says he was too lazy to climb up to the rappel station and too relaxed about his rappel because of the short distance to the bottom, but notes that climbers have been killed in shorter falls. It's not known whether he was still on the rope after he fell, but some troubling questions arise from the numbers given, in any case: If they were using 50-meter ropes and the pitch was 50 meters high as reported, then in order for him to hit the ground when he fell from the ledge, he must have been very close to the end of the rappel rope when he clipped in—close enough to think that the rope would not

reach the ground, and make him wonder why. This account focuses on the seriousness of rappelling, the need for constant awareness of all aspects of the system in use, and the dangers of any sort of offhandedness in climbing. (Source: Orvel Miskiw)

FALL ON ROCK, HEAVY PACK

Alberta, Rocky Mountains, Mount Yamnuska

On August 28, 1994, Stan and Pam were attempting the seven-pitch, 5.8 A1 route "Corkscrew" on Mt. Yamnuska, and had completed the first two pitches. Pam was seconding the third pitch when she took a short swinging fall at a difficult bulge about three meters along a traverse near the start, and badly injured an ankle. Two other climbers nearby, Jeff and Jacquie, began to climb up to help, while Denis K. reported the accident at the Bow Valley Park office at about 1515, after a relay of messages down the slopes. Park rangers reached Mt. Yamnuska shortly afterward, and RCMP were notified. About 1545, Alpine Helicopters, from Canmore, flew two rangers to view the scene close up; another ranger was at the base of the cliff and made voice contact with Jeff and Jacquie, who had just reached the injured climber. She relayed the message that Stan, Jacquie, and Jeff would lower Pam to the bottom of the route.

Two rangers were flown to the base of the cliff by helicopter sling to wait for the victim. The lower was complete by about 1645, and another ranger was slung up to assist. Within a half hour, Pam had been slung out to the road and transferred to Bow Valley Ambulance for transport to hospital in Canmore. She was diagnosed as having fractures of both tibia and fibula, stabilized, given Demerol, and later transferred to hospital in Calgary for surgery. (Source: Pam, and George Field, Alpine Specialist, Kananaskis Country)

Analysis

Pam feels the protection placed by the lead climber was adequate for the situation, but she was carrying a larger pack than usual, and that compounded the difficulty of small holds as she tried to move past the steep bulge. Even though her fall was only about five to six meters on a diagonal, an awkward impact with the rock caused her ankle fractures. (Source: Pam, the victim)

AVALANCHE—MISJUDGED HISTORY OF SNOW PACK

Alberta, Rocky Mountains, Mount Athabasca

On August 31, 1994, mountain guide J.B. and three students on an Association of Canadian Mountain Guides course climbed Mount Athabasca (3490 meters) by the North-east Ridge. They started to descend a variation of the Silverhorn Route. A small slab avalanche swept two of the students, T.P. and S.P., on one rope, over cliffs north of the Hourglass Route. They fell about 300 meters to the glacier. J.B. was carrying a VHF radio, and alerted Parks Canada to the accident. A rescue team assembled at the base of the mountain within thirty minutes to wait for a helicopter. Meanwhile, J.B. and the third student climbed down the Silverhorn and reached the avalanche deposit, where they immediately found T.P. buried to the shoulders, alive but seriously injured. S.P. was totally buried, but they found him near articles of equipment about ten minutes later, after a hasty search. He was not breathing and had no pulse.

Parks Canada rescue personnel arrived shortly afterward and evacuated T.P. by helicopter, to an ambulance at the base of the mountain. He had fractures of both bones of