

CANADA

FALL ON ICE, INADEQUATE PROTECTION, CLIMBING ALONE

Alberta, Waterton National Park, Expert's Choice

On February 10, a middle-aged male was attempting a solo ascent of the lower left pitch of Expert's Choice (WI4). He apparently was dragging a rope and performing a self-belay of some fashion when he fell about 20 meters, pulling out a number of screws on the way. Despite injuries to his hand, back and neck, he was able to walk or crawl down the trail to the roadway, where his wife was waiting. He was driven to hospital, where he remained for at least a month, with a broken finger and a broken vertebrae. (Source: Parks Canada Warden Service)

ROCKFALL

Alberta, Rocky Mountains, Cascade Waterfall

On Feb. 20, after a successful ascent of this waterfall (III, WI3), a party of three were setting up to rappel the route. A large rock (estimated at 50 to 80 lbs) came from above and hit one member in the head. He was wearing a helmet. He was knocked unconscious, and was bleeding from the ears. When he came to, his partners lowered him to the base of the route. A passerby on the highway noticed the evacuation and called the warden service. A rescue party was dispatched along with Banff EMS. The patient was stabilized on the trail and transported to the Banff hospital.

Analysis

The patient was later diagnosed with a depressed basal skull fracture. It is likely that wearing a helmet saved his life. (Source: Parks Canada Warden Service)

RAPPEL ERROR—INADEQUATE ANCHOR

Alberta, Bow Falls

On Feb. 23 around noon, a party of three were starting the descent of this Grade III, WI4 route. F.B. lowered J.P. and D.P. from a three-screw anchor. F.B. then proceeded to rappel from a single Simond 23-cm screw. The rope was draped over the head of the screw with the eye pointing up. A system was rigged on the screw which allows unwinding of the screw when the rope is retrieved. While on rappel, the anchor failed and F.B. fell about 60 feet onto shell ice on the intermediary ledge to which the first two had been lowered. He was complaining of a sore back. The rest of the party was assisted down by an ACMG guide also climbing the route. One person was sent to the trailhead to report the accident. A Warden Service rescue crew responded, and the injured climber was evacuated by heli-sling.

Analysis

Using a one-point rappel anchor can be risky. In this case the single screw and rope arrangement failed and it is likely that one of two things happened. Either the screw pulled out of the ice or the rappel rope slipped enough to wind the eye of the screw to a downward position, thus allowing the rope to slip off the head of the screw. If the latter

happened, the rope would then continue to unwind the screw completely causing failure. The victim was fortunate that the shell ice he landed on absorbed some of his impact, likely minimizing his injuries. He was later diagnosed with only bruising injuries. (Source: Parks Canada Warden Service)

FALL ON ICE, DARKNESS, INADEQUATE TIE-IN AT ANCHOR

Alberta, Maligne Canyon

On March 18 at 2030, a party of three climbers were top-roping a waterfall in Maligne Canyon in Jasper National Park. One of the climbers was experienced, a second was intermediate, and the third was novice. The fact that they were climbing in the dark was intentional on their part, and they were using headlamps.

The last climber to finish the route was removing the anchors at the top of the climb when he fell approximately 25 meters to the canyon floor.

Park wardens were notified at 2100 by one of the climbers in the party. Wardens and paramedics were on the scene by 2130 and shortly thereafter the victim was pronounced dead. Rescue teams ground evacuated the victim from the canyon floor.

Analysis

It is difficult to determine the exact cause of the fall due to lack of direct observation, but wardens investigating the accident site believe the following scenario occurred:

Above the top of the waterfall, the ground slopes up steeply. A main anchor was established at the top of the waterfall. In order to set the top-rope anchor safely, the climbers had attached an 8mm line to a secondary anchor on the more level ground above the main anchor.

Two of the three climbers were at the bottom of the canyon, about to walk out. The third was at the top of the climb and was about to dismantle the system and hike out. He clipped into the safety line with a daisy chain attached to his harness, then dismantled the main anchor. At this point, he apparently leaned back against the safety line, thinking it still solid. With the main anchor removed however, the safety line was no longer attached at its bottom end. When the climber leaned back, he slid right down the safety line and off the end to the canyon floor.

Inexperience combined with climbing in the dark were key contributing factors in this accident. It is likely that with poor visibility the victim did not realize he had removed the integrity of the safety line when he dismantled the main anchor. (Source: Parks Canada Warden Service)

OVERDUE, FATIGUE, INADEQUATE EQUIPMENT, DARKNESS

Alberta, Murchison Falls

Three ice climbers set out to climb Murchison Falls (180m, V, WI4) at 1000, March 27, and were at the base of the first pitch at noon. One of the climbers was ill and returned to the highway, leaving the other two to complete the climb. They agreed to meet at the vehicle after the climb, but set no time, as they believed they would be down after dark.

At 1400 the pair were starting the third pitch. The ice was wet, and the climbers took three hours to climb the final 80 meters. Their only headlamp was left in a pack at the bottom of the climb, and they did not reach the top until dark. It took three hours for the pair to complete four rappels. By 2130 they were at the base of the climb, and were back at their vehicle by 2250. In the meantime, the third climber who had returned early