

## **FALLING ROCK**

### **Alberta, Rocky Mountains, Goat Mountain**

On September 14 M.D.L.C. was climbing with D. C. on a route called Twilight Zone when he was hit in the right hand by rockfall. His thumb was badly crushed and almost amputated. D. C. called Kananaskis Emergency Services for assistance. K. E. S. responded with a helicopter and several EMS personnel. The EMS personnel were heli-slung to the base of the climb where D. C. had lowered the victim. M.D.L.C. was slung out in a screamer suit and then transported to the Banff Hospital for treatment. (Source: George Field, Public Safety Specialist, Kananaskis Country)

## **FALL ON ROCK, INADEQUATE BELAY—ROPE TOO SHORT**

### **Alberta, Rocky Mountains, Back of the Lake Crag**

On September 15, after completing Imaginary Grace (5.8), a climber was being lowered out from the anchors by his partner. The route is 30 meters long and their rope was 50 meters long. The rope went through the belay device and he fell 10 meters to the ground, sustaining ankle and back injuries. (Source: Parks Canada Warden Service)

## **AVALANCHE, FALL ON ICE, INADEQUATE PROTECTION**

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

On March 14, a party of three were climbing Guinness Gully (III, 4), a moderate ice route. The leader had completed the second pitch when a wet avalanche came down the gully. He had 50 meters of rope between him and the other two climbers at the belay below. The other two climbers had another 50 meters of rope stacked between them. None of the three climbers was clipped in to anchors. The upper climber managed to hug a tree at his belay and was not swept down. The two lower climbers were swept down with one of them ending up at the bottom of the first pitch, sustaining a forearm fracture and leg lacerations.

Warden service rescuers nearby witnessed the accident. Two rescuers ran up the approach to assess and treat the injured climber. The injured climber was heli-slung to a waiting ambulance shortly afterwards. The other two climbers, as well as other climbers on nearby routes, were evacuated by heli-sling, as well as other climbers on nearby routes due to the extreme avalanche hazard.

### **Analysis**

As with many waterfall ice routes in the Rockies, avalanche hazard is a constant concern. When climbers left the parking area that morning, it was raining lightly. Unfortunately most of them did not see that as an indication of rapidly increasing avalanche hazard. (Source: Parks Canada Warden Service)

## **FALL ON ROCK, CLIMBING UNROPED**

### **British Columbia, Selkirk Mountains, Grays Peak**

Two climbers departed the Gibson Lake parking lot in the early morning of July 16 and traveled through dense bush for several hours to the base of the west face

of Grays Peak. Their objective was to traverse Grays Peak via the Southwest Ridge.

The weather was clear, with the temperature at 14 degrees C, and a light wind blowing from the southwest. During the night, extensive dew had formed, so both the brush and the granite slabs were wet.

Upon reaching the base of the face, the climbers put their helmets on and began scrambling through fourth class terrain on the west face towards the ridge crest. The climbers were moving beside one another to minimize rock fall exposure. They arrived at a sloping, grassy bench 20 meters deep that bisected the face. One moved into what appeared to be a steeper section of terrain, while the other continued upwards. "A few minutes later I called down to J. and he said he was going to traverse over to where I had ascended." She continued 80 meters higher and waited just below the ridge crest. Ten minutes passed. She heard the distinct sound of a falling object, but no call.

The time was 1105. She scrambled 50 meters back down to the bench on the west face where she expected to find her fallen partner. Upon reaching the bench, there was no sign of him and she received no reply to any calls. She searched the area extensively and then from the edge, saw him 70 meters below on the steep face. He was not moving, lying on his chest on a small ledge with his legs tangled among some small sub-alpine firs.

Since her partner had the rope in his pack, it took some time for her to reach him. Assessing his injuries, she determined that he had a fractured neck, fractured lumbar spine, fractured right femur and extensive lacerations. His level of consciousness (LOC) was low.

She removed his pack, repositioned him, supported his head and neck and covered him. It was 1210, and they were at an elevation of 2000 meters. She assessed the site for rescue potential and then proceeded to descend 650 meters to the Gibson Lake access road for assistance.

She reached the road at 1250 and was picked up by a local doctor and driven 14 km to the West Kootenay Parks office. National Parks was contacted and dispatched from Canmore with long-lining equipment. A local helicopter was deployed from Nelson with medical equipment and a mountain guide. The helicopter picked her and the doctor up and they returned to the accident site at 1545.

The rescue team flew over the west face and could see clothing and equipment, but no sign of the injured climber. On the third pass, he was seen 20 meters below on the edge of the steep cliff face. The team was dropped on the bench above and descended to him. He was in an inverted position with his helmet and most of his clothing removed. He had sustained head injuries.

The team rigged a series of fixed lines on the cliff edge and secured him. National Parks arrived on the scene, and the victim was long-lined down to Gibson Lake and then transferred into the first helicopter and flown to Nelson. A trauma team flew from Vancouver and transported the victim to Vancouver General Hospital.

### **Analysis**

The injured climber remembers no details of the fall. Since he did not call out, both climbers assume he either slipped on the damp granite or a foothold broke loose and he was knocked out immediately. He survived an initial fall of 80

meters and then a series of second falls. His back fracture/dislocation (at T-12 and L-1) indicates a fall directly onto his back with his legs folding forward.

He was wearing a full pack with both his chest and waist strap buckled up. This pack absorbed a significant portion of the impact. His helmet was very well secured after the initial fall. This accident is an excellent example of how even though the climbing may not be that technical for competent climbers, the consequences of a fall in this terrain can be extremely serious.

The weather and time of day contributed to the positive outcome of this rescue. Long-lining equipment is not available locally and was a critical component of the extrication from the cliff face. It is doubtful if the victim would have survived overnight if sling rescue had been unavailable. He received surgery to realign the spine. After rehabilitation, he has made a full recovery.

The route was not in ideal conditions. Even though they were in fourth class terrain, a rope would have been a good idea. (Source: Parks Canada Warden Service)

## **FALL ON RAPPEL**

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

On July 27, after returning from the North Face glacier route, three climbers were rappelling low angle slabs heading to the meadows below. One of them lost control of his rappel for a short distance and caught his foot in a crack. He fractured his ankle. His two partners then assisted him down to their camp below. When they became overdue the next morning, a warden service rescue team was dispatched. The injured climber was flown to the hospital.

#### **Analysis**

It is not known if the climber had a prusik backup to his rappel. (Source: Parks Canada Warden Service)

## **OFF ROUTE, PARTY SEPARATED, INEXPERIENCE**

### **British Columbia, Selkirk Mountains, Avalanche Peak**

Two climbers on Avalanche Peak found themselves separated. One of the climbers with no previous experience down-climbed a series of small cliffs until he found himself looking down a 200-meter vertical drop. Unable to climb back up the cliff bands he had jumped down, he settled in to wait. His partner, who described himself as very experienced, reached the bottom and spotted the stranded climber. Two hikers were sent for help.

An HRS equipped helicopter was working in the area. The stranded climber was slung out by the Warden Service to Rogers Pass.

#### **Analysis**

This situation saw an experienced climber leaving an inexperienced climber to find his own way down, resulting in the climber becoming stranded. (Source: Parks Canada Warden Service)