

WEATHER, INADEQUATE EQUIPMENT, INEXPERIENCE**Alberta, Jasper National Park, Mounts Charlton and Unwin**

On July 15, two inexperienced climbers (both 25) climbed Mount Charlton in the company of two American climbers whom they met on the mountain. In late afternoon, in deteriorating weather, the inexperienced pair continued from the Charlton-Unwin Col up the East Ridge of Mount Unwin towards its summit while the American climbers returned to their bivouac site. The inexperienced pair were soon engulfed in a whiteout and became disoriented and lost. They wandered around the upper mountain over numerous crevasses and to the edge of the large icefall on the North Face. Finally, they bivouacked in a shallow snow cave on Unwin's East Ridge. The whiteout continued the next day, and the subjects became even more disoriented. They had minimal clothing, minimal food, and no water. They built a second snow cave below the summit of Mount Unwin on the North Ridge/Face, and as they prepared for another night out, they were spotted and evacuated by helicopter.

The two Americans reported the climbers overdue when they did not return to the lower bivouac site. The weather had been very poor for three days previous, with over 40 centimeters of new snow deposited in 48 hours accompanied by high winds. A helicopter search of the mountain revealed several large new avalanches, and tracks on the lower glacier. The upper mountain was obscured in cloud, so a ground party was placed on the glacier to search on foot. The ground party followed tracks to the col, and ascended Unwin to just below its summit while the helicopter continued to search by air. The subjects were spotted by air on the opposite side of the mountain, but due to fluctuating low cloud levels, it was not possible to sling to them. After several unsuccessful attempts to reach the subjects, a warden was slung in to a point below their location. The warden climbed up to the subjects, who were guided down to a lower elevation where sling evacuation was possible.

Analysis

Poor weather, heavy snowfalls, and whiteout conditions are the primary contributing causes of this mishap. The subjects lacked the judgment to turn back when the weather deteriorated, and did not plan for white-out navigation. The col and lower East Ridge of Mount Unwin are very broad, and in poor visibility it is extremely difficult to route find without a map and compass or wands. The Charlton-Unwin massif is large and serious, and is prone to poor weather. It has serious objective hazards on all routes, including icefalls, crevasses, bergschrunds, cornices, and avalanche slopes above and below all routes. It is very easy to get lost on the upper mountain, due to the featureless nature of the terrain. Climbers attempting this massif should get thorough information on routes and hazards, and have adequate navigation and bivouac equipment. (Source: Parks Canada Warden Service)

FALL ON ICE, CLIMBING UNROPED, and STRANDED, INEXPERIENCE**Alberta, Jasper National Park, Columbia Icefield, Mount Athabasca**

On July 19, a party of two (both 38) were ascending the Northeast Ridge of

Mount Athabasca, when they encountered technical, exposed terrain. One was hesitant about climbing through this section, so the other climber offered to unrope, solo the difficult section, and drop a top rope down from above. While soloing out onto the south slopes, the climber encountered a thin veneer of ice on the rock. With both crampons and an ice ax in the thin ice, the sheet of ice gave way, and the climber fell approximately 100 meters. He sustained serious injuries to his head and both legs. Both spent the night on the mountain. The uninjured climber anchored himself to the mountain with a snow picket, but was afraid to move from his location. The next morning, with two broken legs, the injured climber crawled over the Boundary–North Glacier Col and made his way down the mountain to a telephone to call for help.

A helicopter was brought over from Golden, and two wardens were slung in to the stranded climber. It was dicey terrain, but the rescuers were able to remain on the heli-sling rope, hike up to the stranded climber and hook him on. All three slung off to the staging area.

Analysis

The route was in poor condition, being plastered in snow and verglas. The rock quality on the lower section of this ridge is extremely poor and is generally avoided by most climbers, who prefer to access the ridge higher up. (Source: Parks Canada Warden Service)

FALL ON ROCK, WRONG ROUTE, INAPPROPRIATE EQUIPMENT

Alberta, Banff National Park, Castle Mountain

On July 27 a party of two began climbing what they thought was the popular Brewers Buttress route, II, 5.6. Unfortunately, they were one buttress too far to the north. On the first pitch, the leader fell about 20 meters with his belayer stopping him one meter above the ground. His highest piece of protection failed but the next one held him and prevented a ground fall. He sustained hand and arm fractures as well as head trauma. His partner was able to call for help with a cell phone. He was evacuated by heli-sling shortly afterwards.

Analysis

The injured climber was planning on using this multi-pitch rock route as “training ground” for alpine routes. He was wearing plastic boots. Most climbers use rock shoes in this terrain. It is fortunate that the one piece of protection held and that his belayer was able to stop him before he hit the ground. One can only speculate what kind of difficulties they may have encountered higher up in this uncharted terrain. (Source: Parks Canada Warden Service)

FALL IN CREVASSE

Alberta, Jasper National Park, Columbia Icefield

At 1840 on August 5, two climbers came off the Columbia Icefield to report that two members of their party of ten were injured and needed helicopter evacuation. All members were Russian Canadian and were planning to travel down the Columbia Glacier icefall from the trench. T.S. (37) was the middle member of a three-person rope team. She lost her balance while crossing a