

## CANADA

### **FALLING ICE, POOR POSITION**

#### **Alberta, Banff National Park, Louise Falls**

On January 20, a number of parties were climbing on this popular multi-pitch water ice Grade 4+ climb near Lake Louise. One of the parties high on the route dislodged a large piece of ice which hit S.G. He sustained crushing injuries to his left foot. He was able to rappel, but unable to walk back to the trailhead. He was evacuated by snowmobile by the Park Warden Service.

#### **Analysis**

As ice climbing continues to grow in popularity, certain routes are becoming more crowded and this type of accident is becoming more common. Parties should take note of their position in relation to others above them. Choosing a different line or abandoning the climb may be the most appropriate actions. (Source: Parks Canada Warden Service)

### **FALL ON ICE, PROTECTION FAILURE—ICE AX TOOL**

#### **Alberta, Banff National Park, Wicked Wanda**

F.B. (32) was leading the crux pitch of this water ice Grade 4+ route on February 2. He was about three meters above an ice mushroom around which he had tied a sling. His ice tool unexpectedly popped out of the ice, causing a large piece of ice to fall on the ice mushroom with the sling, breaking the mushroom off. The screw he had placed six meters below the ice mushroom held his fall. Although this was in a relatively remote area, another climber was able to call for help on his cell phone. Because of gusty winds, the Warden Service rescue crew could only be inserted below the victim by heli-sling. The crew walked up to the site and the victim was lowered and carried down to a suitable landing area. He was then evacuated to the Banff Hospital. F.B. sustained injuries to his ankle and elbow and facial lacerations.

#### **Analysis**

Ice tool placement can be unreliable at times. It is unclear if the slung mushroom would have held his fall if the large piece of ice had not broken it off. (Source: Parks Canada Warden Service)

### **FALL ON ICE, CLIMBING ON THIN ICE**

#### **Alberta, Ghost River, The Sorcerer**

On February 13, C.W. (26) and I, M.H. (38), were climbing The Sorcerer, a Grade V water ice climb. The first pitch went up a thin, mid-angled shield to a lower-angled dish from which the line headed right across slabby terrain and up to a short, steep wall. The ice was in thin condition, but no thinner than other climbing we had done earlier in the season. We discussed and analyzed the condition of the ice prior to beginning and both of us felt that it could be done safely with good protection available in between thin sections.

C.W. led the first pitch and placed three good ice screws in thick ice prior to reaching the short steep step with thin ice. I could no longer see him and after

a noticeable pause I asked him how things were. He responded that he was somewhat unsure about the quality of the ice on the step and was considering retreating. Moments later I heard him yell and fall. The top ice screw held his fall of approximately seven to ten meters.

I was able to lower him directly down to the snow at the base of the climb. Our immediate diagnosis was a broken ankle. We reached 911 on his cell phone and a helicopter evacuation was arranged with Natural Resource Services, Kananaskis Country.

At the time of the fall, C.W. was standing on firm ground at the top of the slabs with his tools in the thin ice on the short steep wall. He was analyzing how well the ice was connected to the rock when he moved one tool slightly and felt the ice sheet give way. He fell feet-first, striking the lower angled slabs with his full weight on one cramponed foot. He was later diagnosed with a broken ankle and broken talus bone. He has had to give up climbing and will one day have to have the bones fused.

### **Analysis**

What to learn from it? Some might say that there was a judgment error for us to consider climbing when the ice was so thin. Others would say that our analysis was sound and that we understood the risks of climbing thin ice and the potential costs of climbing such a pitch. I don't personally feel our judgment or experience were at fault. We simply chose to play the game and lost on the roll of a die. The most obvious lesson to learn from this is to have a heightened caution and attention when climbing through the transition from lower-angled terrain to steeper terrain. If the lower-angled slab had not been immediately beneath him, and he had fallen on steeper ground with nothing to hit, chances are he would be out climbing with me this weekend.

The practice of clipping one of the two ropes into each ice screw has become standard practice for many climbers. The idea is to create a larger "bungee" effect with the dynamic lines, reducing the force on the ice placement with the heightened risk of a slightly longer fall. Whether or not this was a contributing factor is unknown.

Without the cell phone, the management of the accident would have been much more difficult and time-consuming with perhaps very bad results. The blood flow in C.W.'s foot was severely reduced because of the angle of the ankle and the swelling. If he had been forced to stay out longer, there is a good chance that he could have lost the foot entirely. (Source: M.H.)

### **FALL ON SNOW, AVALANCHE (TWICE), POOR POSITION, LATE START, INADEQUATE EQUIPMENT—STOVE**

#### **Alberta, Lake Louise, Wapta Ice Field, Peyto Glacier Approach**

On March 19, Ken Fischer (32), myself—Jonathan Fischer (29), and my wife Carey (31) began what we thought was to be a five day ski traverse of the Wapta Icefield. Due to logistical problems, we had gotten a late start and had started skiing at the embarrassingly late hour of noon. The route traverses Peyto Lake and then continues up a moraine to gain the Peyto Glacier. Our goal was to reach the Peyto Hut at the top of Peyto Glacier, a six-mile day.