

CANADA

FALL ON ICE, INADEQUATE PROTECTION

Alberta, Banff National Park, Bow Falls

On February 12, The Mountaineers party began their approach across the frozen lake at 9:00 a.m., with all on snowshoes except Gordon Schryer (32), who was on skis. They arrived at the base of the snow slope leading to Bow Falls about 11:00 a.m. A British party had geared up and were ascending to the base of the climb.

The British climbers chose a central line up Bow Falls. The Mountaineers party took their time getting ready to allow the British climbers time to get up the route. Schryer and his partner Chris Nowak (32) decided to climb a line to the left of the British team, while the other team decided to take the same line as the British team on a route rated III WI4. After Schryer and Nowak began climbing, a team of two climbers from Montana arrived and chose to climb a line to the right of center.

Schryer and Nowak began their climb, with Nowak leading first and Schryer belaying. Schryer wore a down jacket for warmth while he belayed. All were wearing helmets. The first pitch began in a gully with mixed snow and ice. Once he left the gully (which was difficult to protect) Nowak placed four ice screws for protection. He then set up a belay about 80 feet off the ground using three ice screws.

The ice quality was variable, reported as fairly solid in some places with air pockets and dinner-plating in others. Schryer followed the pitch with little difficulty. He was wearing crampons on his ski boots for the first time; he had worn plastic climbing boots on previous ice climbs.

At the belay, they consolidated gear. After this exchange, Schryer had six ice screws and a number of quick-draws. Schryer began leading the second pitch on a line that trended up and left from Nowak's belay. Schryer placed three ice screws about ten feet apart as he climbed. As he climbed he had trouble removing his tools from the ice. He reported that he was frustrated by this and attributed it to sinking the tools in deeper than usual to get a secure placement due to dinner-plating of the ice.

Just above the third ice screw Schryer followed an ice trough that angled up and right before it leveled off at two or three four-foot ice steps. The ice bulged somewhat above Schryer's third and last ice screw. At the first step, perhaps 30 feet above his last ice screw, Schryer met the British team, who were preparing a v-thread anchor for their rappel. (They had traversed a good distance from the top of their route.) They suggested that Schryer clip into their v-thread, but Schryer declined. Schryer climbed up to the next step. A Brit reported that the next time he noticed Schryer he was trying to catch his balance, taking small backward steps. Then Schryer fell down the

slope and over the edge. He passed close enough to the British team to reach toward them, but he was out of reach.

Schryer fell past Nowak, who was able to hold the fall. Nowak was pulled into the ice by the force of the fall. The ice screws placed by Schryer all held. Nowak shouted to Schryer but got no response. He could, however, hear what sounded like snoring, which confirmed that Schryer was breathing. No one on the route could see Schryer at this time. However, all knew what happened and began communicating about how to respond.

Nowak lowered Schryer somewhat in an attempt to position him in the initial gully. A Brit rappelled down two 60-meter ropes and assessed Schryer's condition. He was initially unconscious, then regained consciousness. The Brit and Nowak coordinated lowering Schryer, with the Brit rappelling along side him for support.

Schryer was semi-conscious with bleeding cuts evident. He had vomited blood. Schryer reported pain in his right knee and shoulders when touched. The other Montana climber arrived. Nowak had him collect warm clothing from the packs just below and bring them up to help keep Schryer warm. They positioned an empty pack and coiled ropes under him to insulate him from the snow. Despite this effort Schryer shivered and complained of the cold. The other Mountaineer rope team arrived during this time. They had to complete the final pitch in order to descend safely. They cleaned Schryer's pitch upon descent and found that all three ice screws were secure.

Schryer was helicoptered to the lodge and taken by ambulance to Calgary where he was treated for a basal skull fracture and other injuries and released several days later.

Analysis

The immediate cause of the accident was a fall on ice, with inadequate protection as a contributing cause. Schryer himself remembers almost nothing of the accident, and can offer no explanation for either declining to clip the Brit's protection or not placing other protection on the last 30 feet. While Schryer had five years of experience in rock and alpine climbing, this was only his second season on water ice. Banff Warden Percy Woods commented that placing an ice screw before the transition from steep ice to less-steep ice at the top of a waterfall is important because climbers are more likely to fall as they change over from front-pointing technique to flat-footing. This transition can be awkward. He said that falls at the transition are the second most common cause of waterfall ice climbing injuries in the park—after getting hit by snow and ice falling from above. (Source: Steve Firebaugh, *The Mountaineers*)

FALLING ICICLE, FALL ON ICE, INADEQUATE PROTECTION

Alberta, Waterton Lakes National Park, Cameron Lake Road, Pearl Necklace

On March 2, a climber was five to seven meters into a lead on Pearl Necklace (50 m. WI 5+), without placing any protection. He had placed a tool