

Analysis

The belayer should have been properly tied in to the anchor point, and should have been wearing a helmet and shoes. A belay directly off the anchor, or at least redirected through the anchor using the appropriate device, would be preferable to belaying directly off the harness in this case. Better communication between the rappeller and the belayer would also have helped. It is remarkable that the victim did not suffer more severe injuries given he was not wearing a helmet and the length of fall. The rappeller and especially the belayer were inexperienced. (Source: Parks Canada Warden Service, Jim Mamalis)

STRANDED—OFF ROUTE, INADEQUATE RESEARCH, EXCEEDING ABILITIES

Alberta, Waterton Lakes National Park, Crandell Mountain, Tick Ridge

A group of 25, including five teacher/leaders and 20 grade 10-11 students, were attempting the “moderately-difficult” scramble up Tick Ridge on Crandell Mountain. Several group members and leaders had difficulty with footing and exposure on the ascent. Upon reaching the Cockscomb Ridge, the leader decided to proceed directly down an easier-looking gully heading southwest toward the Cameron Lake Road. They continued downward through progressively steeper third and fourth class terrain until blocked by vertical cliff bands. They decided at this time (early evening) to send one stronger leader back up the mountain to gain cell phone coverage and call for help. The group was able to build a fire in a relatively safe spot, and stayed put for the evening. The stranded party was observed by rescuers just before dark, and as the reporting leader had indicated the party was safe and secure for the night, a dawn helicopter rescue response was planned. The entire party was slung off the mountain in the morning.

Analysis

While not strictly a mountaineering accident, this report demonstrates what happens when inexperienced people venture into mountaineering terrain. The route was beyond the abilities of several members and leaders within this large group, some of whom had no previous experience with exposure in the mountains. As well, the group leader had not been on the route before and had chosen to attempt an unknown descent line. (Source: Parks Canada Warden Service, Brent Kozachenko)

STRANDED—SOLO CLIMBING, CLIMBING UNROPED, INADEQUATE EQUIPMENT/CLOTHING, WEATHER

Alberta, Peter Lougheed Provincial Park, Mount Brock, Southwest Face

C.F., set out on July 2 around 1400 to do a solo, ropeless climb on Mount Brock, about 50 kilometers south of Canmore in Peter Lougheed Provincial Park. He told his roommate, J.S., he might head to Mount Brock and joked that if he wasn't back in two or three days, “to call someone.” It was hot and sunny. He carried a chocolate bar, two hard candies, two liters of water, a guidebook for the route, a topographical map, helmet, headlamp,

sunglasses and climbing chalk. He wore nylon pants and a nylon jacket. The route he planned to climb was a moderate 5.6 pitch, which he climbed with ease after he ate his chocolate bar. At the top of the ridge, the Southwest Face of Mount Brock exposed itself, presenting "some of the best limestone I've seen," C.F. said Monday. "I decided to explore that face. I had a lot of confidence in my ability...maybe too much. I made the decision consciously. I was leaving the intended route. But I also intended not to climb anything I couldn't climb down." He spent some time exploring the face. A nice pitch of 5.7 took him to a very steep face of limestone with a corner. "When I looked at this I was pretty much blown away; it was pretty awesome, three stars for sure." He focused on the holds, the climbing. Up and down he went, executing the moves, forcing his mind to relax, enjoying what was "probably one of the most amazing climbing experiences of my life." He scaled a pinnacle, a towering rock formation similar to a hoodoo, that brought him to some shattered, broken ledges that he traversed and "in hindsight shouldn't have." Getting up and over them was one thing. Trying to back-climb them was "one of the most hideous experiences of my life." By then the sun was beginning to set, and he set his sights on the summit, planning to scramble down the other side after watching the sunset from the peak. He traveled over to another pinnacle and raced up it, thinking that there would be an easier way down the other side. What he found was an imposing wall of rock. He was only 20 feet from the summit, but the two holds he found on the rock face gave him a bad feeling. He didn't want to attempt them. Nor did he want to try to climb back down the shattered ridge in the dark. He found a small ledge about two feet wide and settled his back against the rock for the night.

His feet dangled down the mountainside, about 1,500 feet of nothing between them and the base of the face. In the dark, he heard rock trickling down the mountain and the scrabbling of claws. With his headlamp, he found the source—the huge bushy tailed wood rat or pack rat. He shooed them away and resumed his sleepless wait for sunrise. The next day he had two starburst candies and a bit of water for breakfast and continued his search for a way off the mountain. "I wanted to finish the route really bad. I read the rock, playing the moves out in my head, trying to focus on climbing the wall but the holds still deterred me. I was skeptical about committing myself to climbing back down those ridges." He did attempt them but the loose rock convinced him to go no further. Several times he got on the wall and tried to do the moves but climbed back down onto the ledge. The wind was "annihilating," burning his face. Another night passed, with a visit from the rats and hours of mental resolution. "I was trying to keep myself positive, to not be scared, to be confident. It was such a learning experience for me. I learned what my capabilities are, how to control my mind. You have to push fear aside. You have no choice."

Day three dawned overcast and cold. C.F. was cold, the rock was cold, the wind was howling. He was out of water, fighting hypothermia and losing his war with fear. The day passed much as the second had, in a frustrat-

ing search for a route off. “I just wanted to go down. I knew I was in trouble.” That night it snowed, near blizzard conditions at that altitude, and his thoughts turned to his own mortality. He pulled his arms into his nylon jacket, sat on the guidebook and map, and placed his pack across his thighs. “At that point I was scared. I was hoping to God someone comes to get me. I’m thinking, ‘Man, I screwed up! I’m in trouble.’” As the storm raged around him the rats came out to visit him again. “I think they wanted me to come and visit them inside their hollow pinnacle but I wasn’t going to fit. They seemed genuinely concerned about me though.” He also thought about his parents back in Regina. “I did the real soul searching. I started thinking about things I’d like to do before I die!” On day four he despaired. “I was fighting a mental battle not to go for those unstable holds. There were two options. I’d take a 1,500 foot fall or get over the top. The storm really beat me down. I was hallucinating, I was fighting hypothermia, my legs were stiff. I was a mess. I was going to commit myself to climbing down that day, and then the helicopter showed up.”

Back home J.S. and his other roommates hadn’t become concerned about C.F. until Thursday night, when he failed to show up for his shift at work. By then, there was no point in alerting rescue crews because nothing could be done in the dark. At first light Friday, they called in the alarm, and by 4:00 p.m. Alpine Helicopters pilot Lance Cooper had spotted their friend. The sight of the chopper sent one thought through C.F.’s head: “Somebody likes me.” Cooper had to hover in close to the rock wall with provincial conservation officer Randy Axani dangling from the end of a 100-foot rope. Axani managed to make it to the ledge, scrabble through a rock wall C.F. had built for protection from the wind, and snapped the stranded climber into a harness. Back home, roommate J.S., one of C.F.’s frequent climbing partners has leveled an ultimatum. “He’s grounded. No climbing for a week.” (Source: Carol Picard, Rocky Mountain Outlook)

FALL ON ROCK, INADEQUATE PROTECTION—NO STOPPER KNOT, HASTE, INATTENTION

Alberta, Cougar Canyon, Slowpoke

“On Saturday, July 13, we gave a lesson on what happens when you vary from your normal safety routine and don’t check all your gear. We were putting up a top rope on Slowpoke, a 30-meter, 5.8-rated climb with a high first bolt and a high belay station (about 15 feet above Cougar creek) for a couple friends who had never climbed outside before. D.H. grabbed my short (55 meter) rope since someone else was eyeballing the route. A moment’s inattention and we both missed a critical part of our standard safety check—the stopper knot. D.H. was lowering down and had reached the second bolt when we ran out of rope and didn’t have a stopper knot. He free-fell about three meters and hit his head, bounced off the cliff fell another two to three meters and hit his head and body again, then bounced into the creek to land in a pool a little less than a meter deep. He went completely limp after the first hit and was just floating once he was in the water.