

Canadian National Parks as a benefit of purchasing a Park Pass and there is no additional charge. With fractures, where there is possible circulation impairment, there is a potential for irreversible limb damage and time may be of essence in obtaining advanced medical care at a treatment hospital. (Source: Bradford White, Banff National Park Warden Service)

AVALANCHE

Alberta, Banff National Park, Mount Wilson, Midnight Rambler

On February 12, John Miner, Jim Andruess, and Russ Howard were climbing Midnight Rambler (240 m. III, WI3) on Mount Wilson in Banff National Park. Two of the three were highly experienced mountaineers and members of the Tacoma Mountain Rescue Unit (WA).

They were hit by a size 2.5 avalanche initiating from a start zone high on the mountain. This likely occurred in the early afternoon. They were carried to the runout at the base of the route and were all buried from one to four metres deep. The three ice climbers were part of a larger group. Other members of the group who had been climbing elsewhere became worried as darkness fell and drove to the trailhead for the climb around 1900. They hiked up to the base of the climb and found avalanche debris and sections of climbing rope coming out of the debris. They searched the deposit and none of the climbers were visible. The buried climbers were not wearing beacons. The search party returned to the highway and reported the accident at the Saskatchewan Crossing Warden station. Park wardens from Banff, Lake Louise and Jasper including two dog teams searched the debris until 0:00 the following morning. One victim was located and dug out. The search resumed at 0700 that morning. The park rescue helicopter was brought in along with more park wardens. The other two climbers were located and dug out later that morning.

Analysis

When they left to start the climb, temperatures were below freezing at the base of the route. Unfortunately, they were not aware that there was a temperature inversion and that at the elevation of the starting zones, temperatures were at or above freezing. When the rescue team responded at night, the residual avalanche hazard from above was evaluated. Temperatures had dropped to an acceptable level and remained below freezing at the start zone elevation the next morning as well. It is unknown if, at the time of the accident, they were still climbing up or if they were on their way down. The temperature inversion conditions could not have been easily being predicted. It is fairly common for ice climbers to not use avalanche beacons. Beacons would not have made any difference in the outcome in this case. (Source: Percy Woods, Banff National Park Warden Service and Tacoma Mountain Rescue)