

Analysis

Solo climbing is unforgiving. Slips and even short falls while wearing crampons can lead to serious injuries. (Source: Percy Woods, Kootenay National Park Warden Service)

AVALANCHE, WEATHER

British Columbia, Yoho National Park, Mount Stephen, Super Bock

On March 6, three ice climbers were approaching the bottom pitch of a route called Super Bock (180 m. III WI5) on Mount Stephen in Yoho National Park. Two of the climbers were in a protected location near the base of pitch one; the third climber was approximately ten metres behind them. A wet avalanche poured down the route and swept the third climber approximately 300 metres down slope and into some sparse trees. He sustained a lower leg fracture and significant bruising. His friends quickly responded to his aid and one carried on down to the CPR tracks below and headed to the town of Field to report the accident. The reporting person was able to flag down an eastbound freight train. With assistance from the two CPR staff on board, the climbers were able to move the patient on to the train. They met an awaiting ambulance 1.5 kilometres up the rails.

Analysis

Temperatures had been above freezing for a few days with intermittent rain showers up as high as the avalanche start zones above Super Bock before the accident. Evidence of recent wet avalanches was apparent on adjacent slopes. Above freezing temperatures and rain are two of the major contributing factors in ice-climbing avalanche incidents. (Source: Percy Woods, Yoho National Park Warden Service)

CORNICE COLLAPSE, AVALANCHE

British Columbia, Yoho National Park, Mount Vice President

On April 9, an American man who was backcountry skiing in Yoho National Park died when he was swept away by an avalanche. Park wardens discovered the man's body at about 1800, buried under about 60 centimetres of snow. He had been skiing on the Vice President, a popular destination for backcountry skiing and mountaineering in the Little Yoho Valley. The victim was standing apart from his party on top of a cornice when it broke off. The human-triggered cornice failure produced a size three avalanche on an east aspect starting at 3 100 metres and running full path. The slab stepped down to the rocks with the crown over a metre deep in some places. The victim was carried more than 600 metres down the mountain. The party, comprised of five or six members from both the U.S.A. and Canada, had a satellite phone and was able to call for help. Six wardens and two rescue dogs were called to the scene. A helicopter with an avalanche beacon suspended below it was used to locate the victim.