



AAC Publications

Skiing - Exceeding Abilities, Poor Snow Conditions

Alberta, Banff National Park, Mt. Temple, Aemmer Couloir

On February 7, at 1:50 p.m., Banff Dispatch received a call from an injured skier who had just tumbled down the Aemmer Couloir on Mt. Temple. The subject stated that he had “tomahawked” down the 600-meter couloir, after falling on his second turn. Amazingly, he was still coherent and walking slowly, but had lost one ski and was quite beat up.

Three Visitor Safety (VS) Specialists were dispatched by helicopter from Banff along with a rescue pilot from Alpine Helicopters. By 2:40 p.m., they were at Mt. Temple. Because the subject had fallen to the bottom of the couloir and landed on relatively flat ground, the rescuers were able to land nearby and load the patient directly into the helicopter. The patient was evacuated to Lake Louise, where he was transferred to EMS, and then the helicopter came back to pick up his partner and the remaining gear.

Analysis

The Aemmer Couloir is a serious ski line with 45- to 55-degree slopes at the top. When stability is good enough to go up there, the snow is often packed hard by continual sloughing, making for challenging skiing with little chance for self-arrest. In these conditions, the couloir is definitely a no-fall zone with serious consequences for a mistake.

This skier was very lucky to have “walked” away from such a big fall with only minor injuries. He was skiing at the ski hill three days later. It was a good thing he was wearing a helmet, which saved him some serious harm, and was able to use his cell phone to call for help quickly, sparing himself a cold night out or a painfully long self-evacuation.

Images

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