



AAC Publications

Slip on Snow or Ice - Climbing Unroped, Poor Conditions

Alberta, Banff National Park, Mt. Lefroy

On July 27 a group of three climbers was descending the normal route on Mt. Lefroy after making a successful summit. One member of the party was making a short traverse over some icy rocks and slipped. He was not wearing crampons. He proceeded to tumble for approximately 100 meters before miraculously stopping in soft snow. He had injured his right knee and right heel. With assistance from the other two climbers, he limped his way back to the Abbot Pass hut. The accident occurred at approximately 4 p.m.

The climbing party decided to call for a rescue at approximately 9 p.m. Being so late in the day, Visitor Safety Specialists were not able to respond by helicopter until first light the following day. Since the patient had only minor injuries, it was reasonable for him to spend the night in the hut and be evacuated by helicopter at first light. Two Visitor Safety Specialists were dispatched from Banff at 5:30 a.m. and were on scene at Abbot Pass by 6:30. The Visitor Safety Specialists assisted the injured climber to the helicopter, and he was subsequently evacuated to Mineral Springs Hospital directly.

Analysis

The climbing party chose to climb Mt. Lefroy quite late in the day. However, after being interviewed, they indicated that conditions were OK for climbing, meaning the snow was not soft. More often than not, it is best to wait for the coolest period of the day to begin a climb with significant steep snow travel. However, it is unknown whether soft snow conditions were a factor in this incident. The climber made an error in judgment by making the decision to risk walking across an icy section without crampons. On the other hand, the lack of crampons may have prevented further injury to the climber during his fall. In sum, this climber was extremely lucky to have stopped in soft snow after falling 100 meters. Had the climber not stopped in that exact location, he would have likely fallen the length of the entire west face, and the outcome would not have been positive.

Images

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