



AAC Publications

Lead Fall on Rock, Falling Rock - Inadequate Protection, Failure to Test Holds

British Columbia, Mt. Robson Provincial Park, Mt. Geikie

On August 15 four experienced climbers were climbing the south face of Mt. Geikie. This is a remote, alpine-style rock climb located at the western portion of the Rampart Mountains in Tonquin Valley. They were climbing roped in teams of two, both parties staying in close proximity to each other. At approximately 10 a.m., one of the climbers was leading a 5.4 pitch when the half-car-sized block he was standing on released, causing him to fall along with it. Tumbling with the large rock, he fell 20 meters before his belayer caught him just as he hit a ledge with the large rock. The rock exploded, spreading shrapnel. The belayer was hit by rockfall, injuring him and forcing him off the ledge. The belayer suffered three broken ribs.

This impact ledge was adjacent to the second party. A third climber, who was standing near the ledge where the block impacted and where the lead climber came to rest, suffered lacerations to his head. He also sustained soft-tissue damage to his ankle where a falling rock penetrated his boot. The fourth climber escaped unscathed. The lead climber suffered massive internal injuries, never regained consciousness, and eventually stopped breathing. They attempted to call out with a satellite phone but had no reception. Both climbing parties' ropes were damaged. They salvaged what they could and performed short rappels to descend. Using the satellite phone, emergency contact was attempted several times during the descent with no reception.

They returned to base camp at 8:50 p.m. and established satellite reception. They called Jasper National Parks Emergency Dispatch to report the incident. At dusk a helicopter was launched from Yellowhead Helicopters in Valemount to fly directly to their camp. The helicopter had just enough daylight to retrieve one person and return to Valemount in the dark. A Jasper National Parks rescue team helicoptered to the camp at first light. The remaining two people were evacuated, and the lead climber was heli-slung off the face and pronounced deceased.

Analysis

This was an unfortunate rockfall accident involving an experienced party. The victim was a longtime Alpine Club of Canada member who had climbed all of the 11,000-foot peaks in the Canadian Rockies. He likely fell as far as he did for a couple of reasons. The belayer was unable to catch the fall because he was hit by rocks, injured, and knocked off his ledge. Also, the victim likely had not put in much protection, as he was on easier 5.4 climbing terrain.

Images

Article Details

Author	
Publication	ANAM
Volume	10
Issue	66
Page	116
Copyright Date	2013
Article Type	Accident reports