



AAC Publications

Stranded - Weather

Canada, Alberta, Jasper National Park, Mt. Edith Cavell, East Ridge

In the early morning of August 9, two climbers left the Cavell parking lot at 3:30 a.m. for an attempt on the east ridge of Mt. Edith Cavell (3,363 meters, Grade III, 5.3). They bypassed rock terrain to climb a snow gully at the start of the route, which added time to their ascent. Once into the more technical rock terrain, they roped up and began to ascend the ridge. Their progress was very slow. By 2 p.m. they reached their highpoint above the big shoulder on the ridge and level with a thin snow band that transects the face at 2,900 meters. It began to rain lightly, and the rock above looked committing, wet, and slippery.

They decided that in their current condition it was too risky to continue up or climb back down. At 2:15 p.m., with a thunderstorm building, they called for assistance on their cell phone. As the weather continued to worsen, with an afternoon buildup around the peak, the subjects were quickly located at approximately 2,900 meters on a good ledge. At 4:30 p.m., two Visitor Safety Technicians were slung to their location and they extracted by heli-sling.

Analysis

The east ridge of Edith Cavell is a long, sustained rock ridge and requires good time management and strong skills in order to complete the route and then descend the west ridge, which has a very long hike out, in a single day. A typical round trip via this route is usually 12 to 14 hours. These climbers made decisions that cost them valuable time and energy, especially in light of a weather forecast that was characteristic for that time of year (thunderstorms building in the afternoon). They were well prepared with all the safety gear to manage the route and undertake a bivouac, but they found it difficult to move efficiently over this terrain, given their skill set, risk tolerance, and degree of fitness.

Images

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