



AAC Publications

Rockfall - Off-Route, No Helmet

Canada, Alberta, Mt. Cory

On August 25, my climbing partner and I had decided to try a seemingly simple mountain named Mt. Cory. [The south ridge of Cory is rated an easy/moderate scramble in Alan Kane's *Scrambles in the Canadian Rockies* guidebook.] After much evaluation we could not figure out the right way to head up. Due to being off-route, the route was more difficult than expected but was still reasonably within our abilities. After navigating through cliff bands, we ended up following the right route on the upper part of the mountain. Getting to the summit was pretty mellow.

On the way down we went the same way we came up. It was late in the day and the route down was a bit dicier due to the slight variation. After navigating more cliff bands, we were getting closer to easier slopes when my partner, above me, knocked off a three-foot-wide boulder. He screamed "Rock!" and I immediately ran across the 3rd class terrain, doing my finest alpine dodge. But the rock happened to bounce the wrong way. I got hit in the head, fell face-first, and started tumbling down the mountain. As I tumbled out of view I broke many bones, including my upper back, a pinkie finger, and collarbone, and got a puncture wound in my side.

Five minutes later, I woke up covered in blood. I had no idea how I got there, what I was doing, or what country I was in. My partner helped me get my shoe back on and back onto my feet. The descent was the scariest time of my life. I became faintish at times and often didn't know where I was. The scramble was a struggle, having broken bones on both arms. At one point I wasn't sure if I could catch myself as I slid down more steep gravel.

Once we were beyond the cliff bands it was a matter of being careful and making it down to the hospital in time. Mosquitoes kept biting me as I carefully scrambled down to safety. An hour later we arrived back at the car. I was excited to make it out alive. We quickly rushed to the hospital, which ended up being a four-day ordeal. (Source: Joshua Lewis.)

ANALYSIS

Several factors should be considered in assessing these events. First and foremost, confirming and following the correct route, using accurate and up-to-date route information, might have helped the climbers avoid unstable ground. Avoid being directly above or below another climber on loose terrain. The climber's partner reported that he had waited until his partner was 15 feet below him and off to the right before moving, but the falling rock unfortunately took a bad bounce. The climbers also said they wished they had brought helmets, which might have reduced the severity of the injured climber's head and facial injuries.

Images

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