



AAC Publications

Fall on Rock – Scrambling Alone

Alberta, Banff National Park, Mt. Whyte

Late in the afternoon of July 28, a lone 30-year-old male was traversing the exposed alpine rock ridge heading southwest from the summit of Mt. Whyte toward Popes Peak. Partway across this traverse, the subject dislodged some loose rocks and fell approximately 300 meters down the northwest side of the ridge, coming to a rest on a flat bench below the face on the upper extent of the Divide Glacier. This face consists of an icy gully with rock bands, with an overall angle of about 45°. The patient was unable to move and lay in the snow calling for help.

At 7:30 p.m., Parks Canada received a call from a party of three scramblers descending the nearby summit of Mt. Niblock. They reported cries for help from an unidentified location. Parks Canada responded with two rescuers and a helicopter and began searching the area. At 8:15 p.m. the patient was located, and rescuers were able to land at his location.

The patient suffered spinal trauma and was paralyzed from the chest down, and he was approaching a hypothermic condition. The patient was immobilized with spinal precautions and loaded directly into the helicopter.

ANALYSIS

Climbing alone always presents serious risks, including falling unroped and lacking a partner to provide assistance in case of an incident. Given the seriousness of his injury, this patient was fortunate that other parties were nearby and able to hear his cries for help. It is unlikely he would have survived the night outside. The reporting party certainly saved his life.

This situation is a good reminder to always leave a detailed trip plan with someone at home, and to carry communication devices to call for help if possible.

Images

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