



AAC Publications

Fall on Rock – Off Route

Alberta, Banff National Park, Castle Mountain

On July 24, Banff Dispatch was relayed a 911 call from a climber whose partner had just taken a 15-meter leader fall on the upper cliffs of Castle Mountain. They indicated they were at the bottom of a popular route, Brewer Buttress (III 5.6), on the Goat Plateau, a wide band of scree midway up the mountain. The lead climber had hit his head, had back pain, and was unable to move on his own but was conscious.

A crew of three Visitor Safety (VS) specialists from Banff and a mountain rescue pilot flew to the scene. After searching the base of Brewer Buttress with the helicopter and not finding any sign, it was discovered that the two climbers were in fact 250 meters left of that route on an unknown or unclimbed line. One VS specialist was inserted close to the wall via a hover exit, and then the helicopter landed at a staging area on the Goat Plateau.

Once more details were acquired, the remaining two VS specialists, with medical gear, were heli-slung close to the scene. The wall above the patient was too steep to heli-sling directly, so the rescue team lowered the patient in a stretcher to a rudimentary trail 50 meters below. Once there, the patient was packaged and heli-slung directly to a waiting ambulance.

ANALYSIS

The largest contributor to this accident was the climbers convincing themselves that the terrain matched the description they had read for a popular climb. However, they ended up climbing terrain more difficult than their intended 5.6 route, along with loose rock with marginal natural protection. Along with carrying a written guidebook description and a photo of the route if available, it is very helpful to landmark large features from various vantages before and during the climb. Getting advice from those who have experience with a particular route is also helpful.

Images



Castle Mountain. Arrow marks the approximate location of Brewer Buttress, above the Goat Plateau ledge.

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