



AAC Publications

Scrambling Fall in Sir Donald Group – Loose Hold

Canada, British Columbia, Glacier National Park, Sulzer Tower

At the end of August, a party of three climbers attempted a lightweight traverse of the peaks that bound the headwaters of the Illecillewaet River, including Mt. Sir Donald. This is a 37-kilometer trip with nearly 6,000 meters of vertical gain and loss. The group was traveling extremely light, with just the bare necessities for their objective.

After successfully summiting Avalanche Mountain and Eagle Peak, the group was scrambling up Sulzer Tower en route to Uto Peak. The climber in the back inadvertently pulled on a loose block while navigating a steep step and fell 35 to 40 meters to a scree ledge, sustaining severe injuries. His climbing partners descended to him and provided initial first aid, but recognized they would need a rescue as soon as possible. With unreliable cell coverage at the injury site, one member reascended their route toward the summit of Eagle Peak and was able to call for help.

A Parks Canada field crew was in a helicopter immediately across the valley when the call came in. They diverted from their course and were able to locate the injured climber within 10 minutes of the call. A second helicopter with a rescue pilot was called in, and the Parks Canada team long-lined into the crash site, packaged the patient, and had the patient down to the highway within two hours of the initial call. The patient was transferred to BC Air Ambulance immediately. He had a broken pelvis, broken back, and multiple open wounds to his face, back, and arms.

ANALYSIS

The peaks near Rogers Pass have some very solid quartzite, but as with all mountains, there are loose sections to be negotiated. Care must be taken to avoid loose rock as best you can, pulling down instead of out on holds, and slowing down when you are among chossy blocks. This group was very experienced, but one pull on a loose block resulted in one of them taking a very long fall that easily could have been fatal. The victim's helmet was smashed in multiple spots, and he likely would have suffered a traumatic head injury if it weren't for the helmet. The team did well to stabilize the patient and call for help.

Images



Accident scene below Sulzer Tower, showing the location of the fall and the patient's location.

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