



AAC Publications

Fatal Fall on Mt. Assiniboine – Loose Rock, Climbing Unroped

Canada, British Columbia, Mt. Assiniboine

A party of two departed the Hind Hut at 5:30 a.m. on August 30 to attempt the north ridge of Mt. Assiniboine. This is the most popular route up this peak, rated 5.5 and Alpine Grade II. Moving relatively quickly, the two climbers gained the ridge at first light. The previous day, they had discussed transitioning to roped climbing at the first steep section, called the Red Band. When the first climber arrived at the Red Band, however, he proceeded to solo this section. When his partner arrived they discussed the change from their original plan, but the first climber was reluctant to downclimb, so after finding an easier route to the right, the second climber soloed the Red Band as well.

After the Red Band, the terrain eased off and the two moved together, still unroped, a few meters apart. Approximately 100 meters below the second steep section, called the Grey Band, the second climber communicated to his partner that it was “time to put the rope on.” After a brief discussion and another 50 meters of exposed climbing, the first climber finally agreed that the terrain was too hazardous to continue without a rope. They decided to move up to a small perch that would provide a suitable spot to rope up. As the first climber moved toward the ledge, his left handhold broke free and he began to fall. The second climber watched him tumble down the north face until he was out of sight. The second climber triggered his SPOT device and then slowly downclimbed to lower-angle terrain and waited for help to arrive. Another climbing party arrived and began to assist in the descent.

Banff dispatch received notice of the emergency SPOT activation at 10 a.m. On an initial flyover, the Parks Canada Visitor Safety team made visual contact with two other climbers on the north ridge, who pointed in the direction of the emergency. After 15 minutes of searching the north face from the helicopter, the fallen climber was located approximately 500 meters down from the site of the fall.

ANALYSIS

Prior to climbing the route, the team did a good job of preparing. They studied the route and had a good understanding of the terrain they would encounter. They agreed on where they would use a rope and identified areas that they would travel unroped. They were prepared with the appropriate equipment and knowledge for a safe ascent.

Two main factors influenced the unfortunate outcome of the day:

- Early separation between the two caused a lack of communication and a departure from their original plan.
- Despite the popularity of this route and the ease of the climbing, the climb still has a lot of loose and fractured rock. This requires a great deal of care, especially when moving unroped.

It is easy to point a finger or say, “I would have never done that,” but during a long climb the decision-making often is not simple. The take-home lesson is that cost/benefit decisions to determine the level of acceptable risk in the mountains must be made collaboratively. If you are going to depart from your initial plan, or if you find conditions different than expected, stop and make sure everyone in your group is on the same page before continuing.

Images

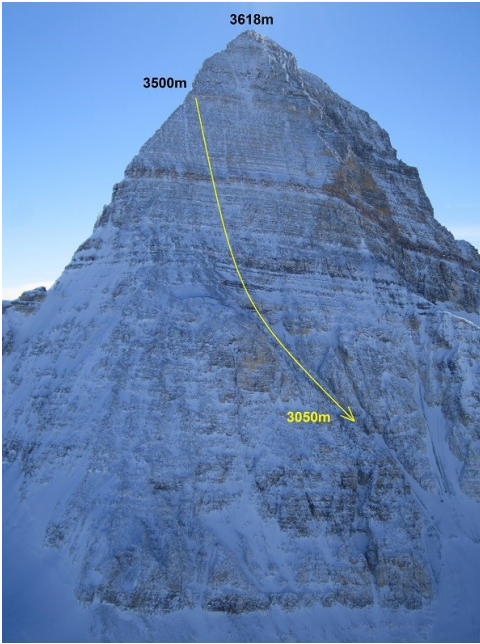


Diagram of the accident on Mt. Assiniboine.

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