



AAC Publications

Leader Fall on Yamnuska – Loose Rock, Inadequate Protection

Canada, Alberta, Yamnuska, Forbidden Corner

An experienced party of two was climbing Forbidden Corner (5.9 R) on April 12 when the leader fell about 10 meters on the fourth or fifth pitch as a result of a broken hold. A piece of protection pulled out and lengthened the fall. As the belayer stopped the falling leader, the climber swung into the wall feet-first, and he sustained a compound fracture of his lower right leg. The pitch had involved traversing, and the climber ended up below and to the left of the belayer. Self-rescue would have been difficult, so the pair phoned for a rescue.

Kananaskis Public Safety responded to the call with six rescuers and a Bell 407 helicopter with slinging capabilities. A direct helicopter sling was attempted, but wind and the steep nature of the route made it too dangerous for rescue personnel. Instead, the rescue team climbed the route to access the patient. The injury was stabilized and the patient and an attending rescuer were lowered to the ground with a twin-rope rescue system.

ANALYSIS

Both climbers involved were experienced and prepared. However, the rock quality in the Canadian Rockies is less than ideal, and in this instance a hold broke with no warning, despite the climber having checked it. In the Rockies, the “three points of contact” rule is especially important: Maintaining weight distribution evenly over multiple holds allows the climber to maintain stability if one hold fails. Poor rock quality also means unreliable protection, so it’s important to place pro whenever it’s available, even on easier ground. (Source: Matt Mueller, Alberta Parks, Kananaskis Public Safety.)

ANOTHER LONG FALL ON YAMNUSKA. On September 1, a climber broke a hold, took a 15-meter fall, and hit a ledge while leading the second or third pitch of a 5.10d route to the right of Direttissima. The fall caused a fractured hip and minor head injury. No firsthand report was available.

Images



Rescuers attempting to reach climbers on Yamnuska by helicopter. Winds prevented this approach, so rescuers ended up climbing from the bottom to assist the climbers.

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