



AAC Publications

Rockfall – Poor Position

Canada, British Columbia, Takakkaw Falls

My girlfriend and I were climbing the standard Takakkaw Falls route (12 pitches, 5.6) on Labor Day weekend. When we arrived, two parties were already on the route: a guide and a young woman, and a less experienced party that had been knocking off loose rocks. I was in the middle of the ninth pitch, 15 meters below the top, when the inexperienced party started rappelling from above. Upon pulling their rope, they dislodged a toaster-size rock that fell about 40 meters before striking my thumb and inner thigh. The thumb was partially amputated and the distal phalange was shattered. My thigh had a large hematoma. We were able to rappel and then drive to Golden for medical aid.

ANALYSIS

Climbing a popular route known for rockfall on a holiday weekend was the first mistake our party made. Our second mistake was continuing up the route despite the rockfall hazard from the inexperienced party. The climbers that dislodged the rock did not appear to yell “rope” before rappelling, nor “rock!” when they knocked off the block. Noise from the nearby waterfall may have been a factor. (Source: Bradley Roach.)

ANOTHER TAKAKKAW FALLS INCIDENT: On September 27, at approximately 12:30 a.m., Banff dispatch received a call from a concerned camper reporting headlamps on the cliffs to the left of Takakkaw Falls. Two rescuers responded and climbed three pitches to reach the stranded party, who were 30 meters apart, at around 3:50 a.m. The party had attempted to rappel with a single rope from a station that only works for a 60-meter rappel. (Even though they had two ropes, they rigged the rappel with a single rope out of fear of getting their ropes stuck.) The climbers had misread the guidebook description of which rappel anchors to use with a single rope, and they lacked the skills—route-finding, rope ascension—to get themselves out of their predicament.

Images



The popular 12-pitch Takakkaw Falls route is left of the waterfall.

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