



AAC Publications

Rockfall Incidents – Off-Route, Crowds

Canada, Alberta, Mt. Temple, East Ridge

Two rockfall incidents on the popular east rige of Temple resulted in injuries and evacuations. On July 30, a party of three high on the route had just made the long traverse left across loose ledges to gain gullies through the Black Towers. Route-finding can be difficult in this area, and this party began ascending the wrong gully. After one pitch, the leader realized he was off route and started to rappel back down. He dislodged a large rock that struck the head of one of the other climbers, cracking the helmet and causing a concussion. The team was able to retreat back across the ledge to a high point on the ridge, from which they were evacuated.

On August 9 there were multiple parties lined up on the east ridge. In the middle of the route is the Big Step, a steep, three-pitch section of 5.7 climbing. A climber in a lower group was struck by rock dislodged by a climber above, sustaining a shoulder injury. The climber was lowered to a large ledge below the Big Step with the assistance of the upper party and evacuated from this ledge.

ANALYSIS

The risk of rockfall or dropped gear is always present when climbing or belaying below others. Clear communication between parties, anticipating the trajectory of possible rockfall, establishing protected belay stances, and timing the ascent of each pitch can minimize the risk. Crowding sometimes can be mitigated by earlier starts, as well as efficient leads and change-overs at belay stances, spreading parties out. Congestion on popular routes will continue to be a challenge with the growing popularity of climbing. Sometimes it's best to choose a less crowded route or wait for a quieter day.

Images

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