



AAC Publications

Rappel Error – Loss of Control and Pendulum

Canada, British Columbia, Mt. Assiniboine

On July 29 a climber was descending the northeast ridge of Assiniboine and was rappelling diagonally to reach a ledge when the climber slipped and swung back into the fall line, impacting a protruding rock. The resulting injury prevented the party from continuing down the mountain. They activated a personal locator beacon (PLB). When there was no emergency response after two hours, one of the party continued descending to the Hind Hut and used the emergency radio there to call the Assiniboine Lodge for help. A Parks Canada Visitor Safety team was dispatched, and the patient was heli-slung down to the Hind Hut.

The initial PLB signal had provided coordinates that were seven kilometers south of the party's location. This caused a delay of several hours in emergency response.

ANALYSIS

Even a modest swing on rappel can cause serious injuries, and this accident reinforces the importance of rappelling with a “third hand” backup, in case a person is incapacitated or loses control because of an incident during a rappel. Why the PLB coordinates were inaccurate is unclear. It is possible the device was being switched on and off and thus did not obtain and send more accurate coordinates, or the party's location on the mountain may have been suboptimal for the PLB to communicate with satellites. Make sure the emergency contact associated with your communication device is up to date and that the contact knows your climbing plans; this can help immensely in the case of a confusing emergency signal. It is also recommended that parties traveling in the mountains carry a two-way emergency communication device, in order to provide immediate updates and location confirmation.

Images

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