



AAC Publications

Fall on Rock – Inadequate Protection, Handhold Broke

Canada, British Columbia, Squamish, Stawamus Chief

On the morning of August 4, a 33-year-old man was leading the fourth pitch of Parallel Passages, a long 5.10 route in the North Walls area of Stawamus Chief. This highly experienced climber, with 5.13 trad routes under his belt, had free-soloed this route previously. There is a 5.4 scrambling section on the traversing fourth pitch, and the climber did not place any protection on this section. His belayer reported that a handhold broke and he tumbled approximately 25 meters, striking three ledges. His partner soloed up the lower part of the pitch (5.10a) to access the climber and wait for help with him. Other climbers arrived and were able to lower the patient to a ledge and administer first aid. The patient passed away before he could be long-lined off the cliff by helicopter, four hours after the accident. (Sources: Rock and Ice magazine and other published reports.)

ANALYSIS

Regardless of how easy the climbing might be or the abilities of the leader, the potential for a dangerous fall is always present. Familiarity with a route does not preclude the possibility of holds breaking or encountering wet or vegetated rock, or unforeseen hazards such as aggressive wasps. The merits of free-soloing a difficult pitch to administer first aid can be debated, but one maxim of performing rescues is to avoid unnecessary danger that might result in a secondary accident. (Source: The Editors.)

Images

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