



## AAC Publications

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### **Fall Into Moat — Climbing Unroped, Exposure**

Canada, British Columbia, Coast Mountains, Chimai Mountain

**Seven mountaineering club members had planned a climb of Chimai Mountain (2,306 meters), northwest of Squamish, in July. Although the mountain is glaciated, online research had suggested there was a route to the top that did not involve glacier travel.** As a result, they took no ropes but did carry ice axes, crampons, and helmets.

On July 18, they made an early start from a logging road at the bottom of the valley. During the ascent, two members of the group fell behind while the remaining climbers continued on to reach the summit by midafternoon. The final leg of the ascent involved a short diagonal route along a narrow snow line between a small bergschrund feature and a large moat just below. While descending the same route, one member of the group (male, mid-50s) slipped in the soft snow above the moat and, unable to stop, slid over the edge and free-fell about four meters before entering the moat, striking rock outcrops along the way. The individual landed on rock approximately five meters below the lip of the moat.

The party activated a satellite distress beacon while attempting to provide aid to the injured person, who was responsive. Without a rope, they were unable to extricate the stranded member, though they were able to get extra clothing to him.

Due to the remote location, it was well over an hour before Squamish Search and Rescue was able to reach the site via helicopter. Rescuers found the subject standing in the bottom of the moat but, due to language difficulties, were not able to communicate with him. After building snow anchors, a rescuer rappelled into the moat and attached a rescue harness to the patient, so he and the rescuer could be raised out of the moat. At the hospital, the patient was found to have serious head trauma and a spinal injury.

All of the other party members were mildly hypothermic, as they had given all of their extra clothing to the patient. The entire team, including the two members who had stopped well below the summit, was flown out by helicopter.

### **ANALYSIS**

When traveling on soft snow, especially on a western aspect in the afternoon, crampon spikes may not penetrate sufficiently through the snow layer to provide secure footing. Also, crampons may ball up with wet snow. Careful plunge-stepping and use of an ice axe are required to remain secure.

An awareness of hazards below might have helped the party pick a better descent route. While avoiding crevasses, the climbing party exposed themselves to other hazards, and without a rope they did not have the ability to protect themselves or perform a companion rescue. It should be noted that moats can be deeper than crevasses, and they also can hold numerous rock outcroppings—as in this case—so a fall can easily result in serious injury.

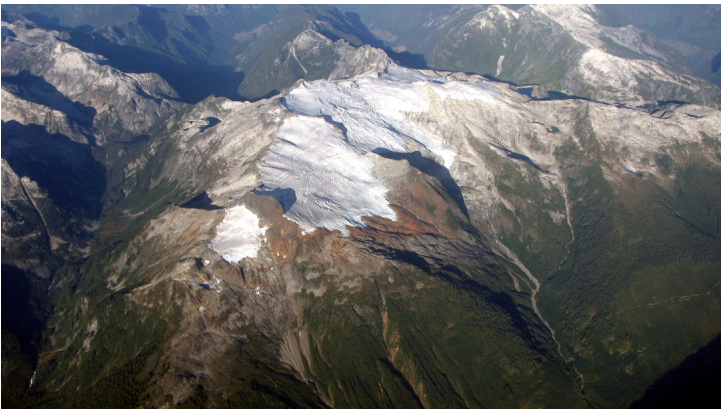
Mountaineers should be prepared to undertake a rescue because an organized rescue may be some time away, even in good weather. They also should take extra clothing and gear to deal with an emergency. In this case, the party members had only a single extra layer each, which they gave to the

injured party, leaving themselves exposed to the cold. This turned the entire party into rescue subjects. Members of this group also became separated, reducing the number of people available to provide assistance and prolonging the rescue. (Source: Bob Manson, Squamish Search and Rescue.)

## Images



Rescuers at the site of a fall into a moat (marked) on Chimai Mountain. The party had been descending steep snow behind the rock arête, left of the rescuers, when one slipped.



Aerial view of Chimai Mountain.

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