



AAC Publications

Leader Fall — Loose Rock, No Belay, Possible Haste

Canada, Alberta, Banff National Park, Mt. Rundle Traverse

On July 20, a party of three made their second attempt to traverse Mt. Rundle from Canmore to Banff. They had attempted the traverse earlier in the summer and made it to a bivy site just beneath Peak 7. They aborted the attempt at that time because the traverse was too snowy, making for slow travel. They monitored the peak and made their second attempt after a period of good weather that melted away the alpine snow, leaving the ridge in dry condition.

The Mt. Rundle Traverse covers about 25 kilometers and passes over 11 separate summits. The technical difficulty is about 5.5, but loose rock and the sheer length of the traverse compound the difficulties. The complete traverse usually requires at least one very long day.

In the afternoon, the party reached Peak 10, which has a short chimney climb right below its summit. At this rock step, one of the party members (E.M.) wanted a belay. A.S. offered to drag a rope up to the top, set up an anchor, and belay E.M. up. A.S. was about 20 meters up, comfortably climbing the chimney, when a foothold broke and the climber fell to the ledge below, breaking one lower leg. A.S. was not on belay at the time of the fall, so E.M. pulled in the slack and wrapped the rope around her hands. This makeshift belay and the rope running around a large, loose boulder blocked A.S. from tumbling further down the west side of Mt. Rundle.

Immediately after the fall, at 2:45 p.m., the party requested a rescue with their inReach device. Parks Canada rescue personnel were able to communicate with the climbers on their cell phone briefly, but the phone battery was low, and cell communication ended abruptly. At 3:45 p.m., two rescue personnel heli-slung into the accident site, placed a bolt to secure personnel and party members, administered first aid, and slung the patient down to the awaiting ambulance.

ANALYSIS

Members of the party were in their 20s and had moved to the Bow Valley a year and a half prior to attempting the Mt. Rundle Traverse. They had approximately four years of mountaineering experience in Scotland and some locally. They were properly equipped with technical climbing equipment and were well prepared to call for rescue.

Loose rock is common in the Rockies. Carefully selecting and testing handholds and footholds is a common strategy to prevent a fall. The consequences of the fall may have been minimized if the lead climber had been belayed and was able to place protection. Likely, the desire to move quickly through this passage, with another technical peak and a long descent still to go, contributed to the decision to climb unbelayed. (Source: Banff, Yoho & Kootenay National Parks Visitor Safety Team.)

Images



Peak 10 of the Rundle Traverse, showing the chimney where a climber fell.

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