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Rappel Error — Uneven Ropes, No Backups

Canada, Alberta, Jasper National Park, Maligne Canyon

A party of four with two very experienced climbers and two beginners set up top-ropes on the Angel Falls ice climb in Maligne Canyon on February 17. At the top, Person 1 lowered Person 2 to the bottom of the climb (about 20 meters/65 feet), and then tied a bight in the rope and lowered Person 3 to the bottom. Person 1 then prepared to rappel but failed to readjust the ropes or tie stopper knots in the ends of the rope or any other backup. Around 2 p.m., he began to rappel and one end of the rope slipped through his brake hand and the rappel device. He fell about 15 meters (50 feet) to the canyon bottom. Efforts by medically trained first responders and eventually a paramedic failed to revive the climber.

ANALYSIS

Complacency while setting up rappels can lead to fatal errors even by the most experienced climbers. Verifying that both ends of the ropes have reached the ground—which would have been easy in this case with two climbers at the base of the route—and using backups will save your life in the long game. (Source: Darren Vonk, Jasper Visitor Safety.)

Images

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