



## AAC Publications

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### Rockfall

Canada, Alberta, Banff National Park, Lake Louise, Back of the Lake Crag

**On May 23, several climbers were sampling some of the high-quality traditional routes at the Amphitheatre at Back of the Lake on a warm early season day.** One climber was gearing up at the bottom of the cliff when a tennis ball-size rock fell from above and struck the climber in the helmet. The rock broke the helmet and knocked the person unconscious. When they regained consciousness, the climber was bleeding from their head and had pain in their neck. The climber's partners called Banff Dispatch for help.

### ANALYSIS

Situational awareness is always important in identifying dangers and reducing risk, especially when it comes to overhead hazards. Though loose rock is a danger in all mountains and most cliffs, the Back of the Lake has unique hazards. Located at an elevation of about 5,740 feet, it is fairly cold much of the year and holds a deep snowpack throughout the winter and early spring. The high-quality climbing is located on a band of quartzite that is capped by a 100 to 160 feet of loose shale. Especially when the snow melts and dislodges rocks, this weaker upper shale band exposes the lower cliffs to significant falling rock or debris. In this case, it is likely the severity of the climber's injuries was reduced because they wisely wore a helmet at the base of the cliff. (Source: Parks Canada.)

## Images



The Amphitheatre at Back of the Lake. The solid, light-colored quartzite is topped with a tall band of dark, loose shale.

Article Details

Author	Parks Canada
Publication	ANAM
Volume	12
Issue	75
Page	104
Copyright Date	2022
Article Type	Accident reports