



AAC Publications

FATAL FALL ON ROCK – Loose Rock

Canada, Alberta, Jasper National Park, Bedson Ridge

Person 1 (female belayer, 29) and Person 2 (male leader, 29) were climbing on Bedson Ridge near the northeast boundary of Jasper National Park. This area has multi-pitch climbs on highly compact limestone. The pair were friends and had been climbing on and off together for five years. Person 2 grew up in the area, and Person 1 was a frequent visitor to Jasper National Park.

The pair were climbing the popular route Return to Splendor (8 pitches, 5.8), which was considered well within their ability. They started the route at approximately 10:30 a.m. and began climbing pitch seven at about 1 p.m. Person 2 was leading and had placed at least four pieces of gear on the pitch. As Person 2 continued over steep terrain, Person 1 heard Person 2 call “Oops!” and then saw a “bread loaf-sized” rock fall past her at the belay. Person 2 fell back and out from the wall, striking a narrow ledge about three meters (10’) above the belay. He continued falling and impacted the wider ledge where Person 1 was belaying. Person 1 reported never feeling any jolt on the rope. It is believed a large cam (number 3 Camalot) was pulled from its placement by the force of the fall.

Visitor safety specialists from Jasper National Park responded to the call for help and stayed in contact with Person 1 via cell phone and Garmin inReach. On the first helicopter fly-by, Person 1 was observed crouched on the ledge; she had attached two long runners in sequence to Person 2’s harness. (A gear loop was all she could reach at the time.) Person 2 was observed two or three meters below the belay ledge, hanging upside down. The subject had slumped off the ledge slowly, and Person 1 was trying to hold him in place to keep from dropping further.

A rescue specialist slung onto the ledge from the helicopter and helped Person 1 escape the belay. They were slung off the ledge to a staging area. A technician then was slung to the location and lowered to Person 2 to assess the subject. They observed significant trauma to the face and neck and confirmed the subject was deceased. Person 2’s helmet was mostly intact. The subject and the technician both were heli-slung to the staging area and transported to waiting authorities.

ANALYSIS

In a follow-up interview with Person 1 (belayer), they recalled that Person 2 was climbing well and that there was no indication he was struggling with the climbing. The fact that they heard Person 2 call out before the fall and the report of a large rock dropping past the belay seem to indicate that Person 2 pulled a loose hold from the wall, possibly after failing to test a critical hold adequately. Once the hold broke, the subject was thrown off balance and fell backward and upside down, pulling out the number 3 cam. It is believed that the subject fell between 15 and 18 meters (50’ to 60’) before hitting the belay ledge. (Source: Parks Canada.)

Images

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