



AAC Publications

FALL ON ROCK – Inadequate Protection

Canada, Alberta, Banff National Park, Mt. Temple

On July 15, two climbers were nearing the top of Mt. Temple's north face via the Greenwood-Locke Route (20 pitches, 5.10+) on their second day of climbing. The route was in relatively dry summer condition, and the weather was clear and calm.

At 4 p.m., the leader fell approximately 35 feet after a handhold broke and the highest piece of protection failed. It was an old knifeblade piton, 10 feet below the point where the climber fell. The piton had appeared loose, but the leader tapped it in before clipping it. A number 2 cam had been placed five feet below the knifeblade, and it held the fall. During the fall, the leader's right foot struck the rock face and they broke their right tibia. After reascending to their high point and attempting to continue, the climber decided the pain was too severe and lowered to the belay.

At 5:30 p.m., after an initial assessment and confirming their position, the team called Parks Canada to discuss descent and rescue options. During this conversation, Parks Canada SAR decided to proceed with a helicopter sling rescue. The climbers were located at the base of a gently overhanging face. They were directed to rappel one pitch to a prominent buttress that could serve as a safer pickup point for the rescue team.

A team of three rescuers plus a pilot responded from Banff, and the pair was quickly located. The helicopter took the empty long-line up to the rescue location to test power and wind conditions, and then a single rescuer slung onto the ledge and drilled a bolt anchor. From here, the climbers and rescuer were slung off the mountain to a staging area, from which they were loaded into the helicopter and flown to waiting paramedics in Lake Louise.

An evaluation at the Banff hospital confirmed the climber's ankle and lower right ribs had been broken. The climber traveled to their home country, where they had surgery to repair the ankle.

ANALYSIS

Cell phone coverage from Lake Louise greatly facilitated communication with Parks Canada. Having a backup battery was also helpful for the multiple phone calls, texts, and photos that were sent during the rescue.

Despite the injury and their high position on the wall, the climbing team had confirmed they were ready to descend on their own if Parks Canada was unable to assist. Concerns about a self-rescue included the need to clean the gear from the pitch above the belay to facilitate building rappel anchors; rappelling the route's traversing pitches; navigating the talus field back to the car; and executing many short rappels. In addition, the team had decided to climb on a single 60-meter, 9mm rope and chose to leave their tagline behind to save weight. In retrospect, a two-rope system would have been more appropriate for the route and would have allowed for longer rappels if required.

(Source: Parks Canada.)

Images



Flying toward the north face of Mt. Temple to rescue two climbers on the Greenwood-Locke Route (right-center in the face).



Staging for a helicopter rescue on Mt. Temple.



Rescuers' view of two climbers who have descended to a potential pick-up point on the north face of Mt. Temple.

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