



## AAC Publications

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### **FATAL FALL ON ROCK**

Canada, Alberta, Banff National Park, cascade Mountain

**Married couple Daniel Heritage (28) and Emma Heritage were midway up a popular multi-pitch route called Mother's Day Buttress (8 pitches, 5.6) on Cascade Mountain.** Leading the fifth pitch, Daniel chose a more difficult (5.8) variation up a steep corner. Near the top of the pitch, he slipped and fell approximately 20 meters (65'), coming to rest near the belayer. He hit several ledges as he fell and sustained major trauma. It is unknown if any of Daniel's protection failed or if he was run-out above the last piece of protection. Emma attempted basic first aid and called for help on her cell phone.

The Parks Canada SAR leadernspoke to Emma and coached her to tie off the belay and attempt first aid. Parks Canada SAR responded via helicopter, while a Banff emergency services ambulance and the STARS air ambulance helicopter were dispatched to the staging area. The SAR team was able to heli-sling into the belay and bring the injured climber down to the waiting ambulance. A team of paramedics and a doctor met the patient and pronounced him dead on scene. Emma was also heli-slung down to the staging area with the rest of the SAR team.

### **ANALYSIS**

This was a tragic climbing accident. We don't know the exact cause of the fall, but it appears that the leader was moving through easier terrain and getting close to the next anchor when he fell. Because the terrain was easier, Daniel had not placed much protection, so the resulting fall was longer. One possible cause of the fall is that the leader pulled on a loose hold. There is plenty of loose rock in the area, and the leader was on a less-traveled variation of the route.

This accident is a good reminder to be diligent in checking for loose holds and to consider regular gear placements even on easy terrain. The consequences of a long fall in easy terrain can be just as bad or worse than in steeper terrain, even though the likelihood of a fall is lower.

The accident happened on a warm fall day with little wind, not far from the Parks Canada rescue base, providing ideal conditions for the rescuers to access the site via helicopter. The belayer also had a cell phone and was able to call for help immediately, which gave the lead climber the best possible chance of survival. (Sources: Parks Canada and Grippled.com.)

## Images



Looking up from the accident site on Mother's Day Buttress, showing the general terrain where the leader fell.

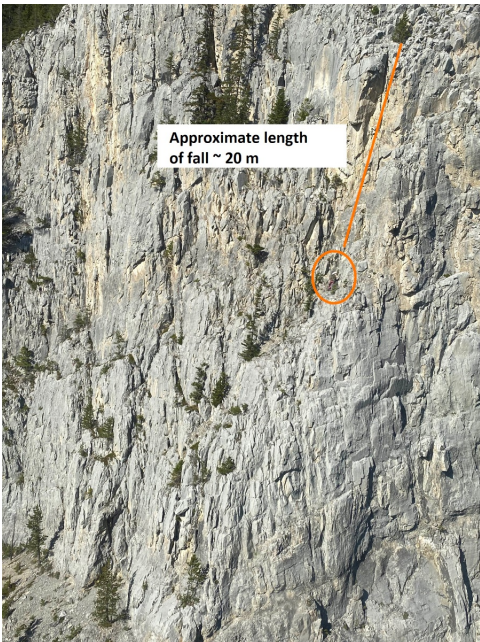


Photo-diagram of the accident scene on Mother's Day Buttress and the length of the leader's fall.

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