



## **FATAL CORNICE COLLAPSE**

Canada, British Columbia, Yoho National Par, Mt. Des Poilus

**On April 13, a group of ski tourers was on a multi-day traverse on the Wapta Icefields and had planned to climb the southeast side of Mt. Des Poilus (3,161m/10,370').** In clear and calm weather, they ski-toured up the glacier and then bootpacked up the final corniced ridge toward the summit. Traveling unroped, the person in front triggered a large cornice collapse, and they fell approximately 250 vertical meters down the northeast face. The remaining party members called for assistance via a satellite device. They also attempted to locate the person by setting up a rope to look over the edge but were unsuccessful.

A Parks Canada team from Banff and a pilot from Alpine Helicopters flew to the scene. The other members of the ski-touring party were told to descend and start making their way back to the hut. Concerned about the residual risk of cornice fall, the rescue team minimized time on the scene. A rescuer confirmed the skier was deceased, and they were transported out of the area via helicopter long-line. The remaining party was then transported via helicopter to the valley floor.

### **ANALYSIS**

While traversing corniced ridges, there is often significant uncertainty as to where a cornice starts and where solid ground ends. Giving cornices an extra wide berth can help manage risk, but this also may push people into steeper terrain. Another option is to rope up, with a good amount of distance between party members. It is unknown whether this method would have been effective in the incident described. The cornice collapse was very large, which may have exposed others to falling. (Source: Parks Canada.)

## Images



A cornice collapse near the top of Mt. Des Poilus led to an unsurvivable fall of about 250 meters.

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