Lowering Error on Ice — Ankle Fracture

Canada, Alberta, Jasper National Park, Tangle Creek Falls

I, Karl Parkinson (32), was climbing with a group at Tangle Creek Falls (WI 2/3), a beginner-friendly ice crag in Jasper National Park. The group was a mix of experienced and beginner ice climbers. My belayer was an ice climbing novice in their 50s.

Partway through the day, we set up a top-rope in the middle section of the falls—the terrain here was low angle and moderate, with a short vertical section at the top. While top-roping, I noticed significant rope drag. At the top, I found that the climber strand and belay strand were twisted. I secured myself to the anchor, called for slack, fixed the twist, and rethreaded the rope through the anchor. I called for my belayer to take up the slack and began lowering.

While lowering, I walked diagonally to climber's right, intending to place an ice screw partway down the vertical section as a redirect to prevent the rope from twisting again. When I went over the lip onto the vertical section below, I slipped and swung back to climber's left, putting my feet out to brace against the ice. My right foot impacted first; I immediately felt pain and could not bear weight on the ankle. My belayer lowered me carefully to the ground, where two experienced climbers provided first aid and helped me to the road. My belayer drove me to the hospital in Jasper, where I was diagnosed with an avulsion fracture of the fibula in my right ankle.

ANALYSIS

I could have used better communication. When I noticed the rope drag and twisted strands at the top, I should have told my belayer what I planned to do to rectify the situation: Had they known I intended to place a redirect partway down, they likely would have taken in more slack and lowered me more slowly over the lip.

I also could have taken more care when moving from level to vertical terrain—this is especially true on ice. I could have placed the redirect before stepping over the lip or used an ice tool to downclimb rather than simply stepping over. I also could have lowered straight down and then traversed to place the redirect. Any one of these would have reduced or eliminated the swing. (Source: Karl Parkinson.)

Images

Article Details

Author	Karl Parkinson
Publication	ANAM
Volume	1
Issue	14
Page	
Copyright Date	2026
Article Type	Accident reports