Rockfall — Leader Pulls Off Loose Block

Canada, Alberta, Banff National Park, Cascade Mountain

Rescue scene on the Hendo Spur, Cascade Mountain. The party is visible in the yellow circle. Photo: Parks Canada

On July 19, a party of three was ascending the summit ridge of the Hendo Spur, the East Ridge of Cascade Mountain (2,998m). While climbing a short, steep step on the ridge crest, the leader pulled on a block that subsequently detached. The climber fell approximately two meters unroped onto scree, then tumbled an additional three to four meters before stopping just above a significant drop.

The climber sustained a dislocated shoulder, which the party was able to reduce on scene. The remaining climbers secured the patient at a bolted anchor on the ridge crest and contacted Banff Dispatch by cell phone. The patient was conscious and able to assist in the rescue.

Banff Visitor Safety Specialists flew to the site by helicopter, circled to assess the scene, and established radio contact with the party. A rescuer was inserted by long-line, packaged the patient for evacuation, and slung them to the staging area. The two uninjured climbers were also extracted by long-line.

ANALYSIS

Loose rock is a constant hazard on alpine ridges in the Canadian Rockies and holds should be treated as unreliable until proven otherwise. The challenge on a long route lies not just in testing any single hold but in maintaining that vigilance across thousands of moves over many hours. Attention tends to fade as fatigue accumulates, and accidents frequently happen not at the hardest moves but at routine ones late in the day.

This fall was only two meters, but the stopping point was a short distance from a fatally large drop. Short falls in committing terrain can have the same consequences as long ones. The party's prompt communication and organized response helped secure a quick rescue. (Source: Parks Canada.)

Images



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