Leader Fall — Multiple Pieces of Protection Pulled

Canada, British Columbia, Kootenay National Park, Stanley Headwall

This injured climber fell 20 meters after pulling four pieces while leading the first pitch of Cosmik Debris (WI6 M6) on the Stanley Headwall. The route follows a line of drips left of the big waterfall behind the rescuer's right shoulder. Photo: Parks Canada

On November 20, two climbers started up Cosmik Debris (WI6 M6), a route on the Stanley Headwall to the left of the classic ice climb Nemesis (WI6). The leader placed four pieces of protection, ran it out, then clipped four more pieces—including two fixed pitons, a nut, and a No. 1 Camalot. On the next move, the leader's ice tool slipped and they fell, stripping the top four pieces, including the fixed pins. The climber struck the wall during the fall before hitting the ground near the belayer, having fallen about 20 meters.

The climber sustained bent crampons and a fractured right ankle, along with cuts and bruises. Other climbers in the area rushed to assist; the injured party was stabilized and carried downhill to an open area below the route.

A nearby off-duty Parks Canada staff member sent an SOS via Garmin inReach. Two Parks Canada Visitor Safety Specialists responded from Banff by helicopter, landing close to the patient. After splinting the patient's lower leg and immobilizing the spine, they slung the patient out and transferred them to an ambulance at the highway.

The following day, on an adjacent mixed route called Victoria's Secret Deviation (M7+), another leader fell 15 to 20 meters after ripping six pieces: a No. 1 Camalot, a Knifeblade, a Birdbeak, a fixed Lost Arrow, a No. 0.75 cam, and a No. 0.2 cam. Several of these were considered solid placements. Both the lead climber and their belayer were uninjured.

ANALYSIS

The Stanley Valley is known for hard mixed climbing on high-quality limestone with cracks that generally take good protection. Despite this reputation, placements may not be as reliable as they appear.

Fixed pitons should be tested and treated as suspect, as should any placement in icy cracks or frosty rock. Two stripping falls in two days on adjacent routes is a reminder that even experienced climbers on familiar terrain can be surprised. Place gear frequently and resist the temptation to run it out. (Source: Parks Canada.)

Images



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