



Parks
Canada

Parcs
Canada

Canada

Avalanche Search and Recovery

February 5-11, 2015

- Air Rescue Component
- Technical Ground Rescue Component
- Avalanche Rescue Component





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Polar Circus Ice Climb

- Located in a remote part of Banff National Park in the Canadian Rocky Mountains.
- 700-metre (9-pitch) ice climb.
- Significant avalanche terrain both on and above the route.



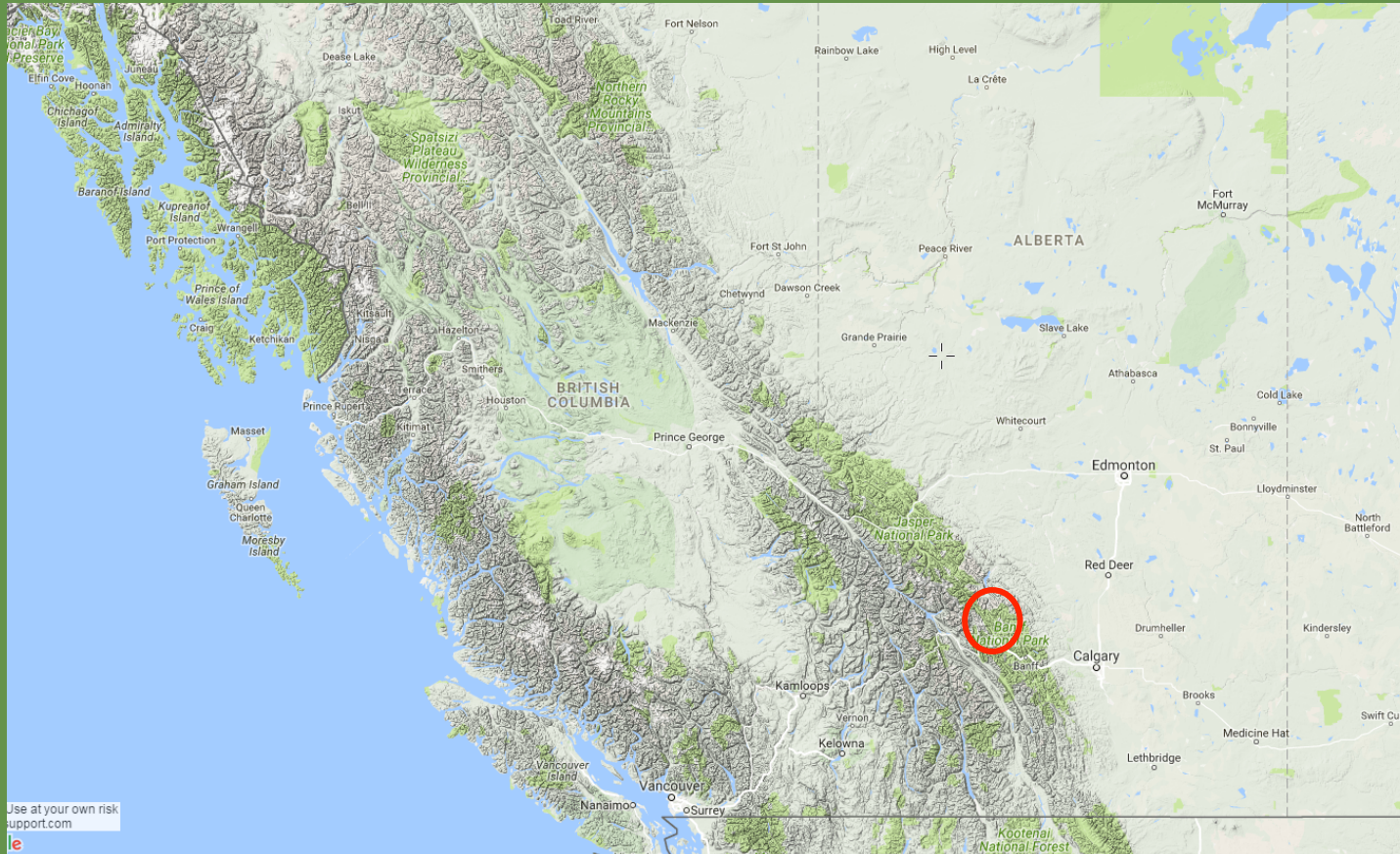


Polar Circus Ice Climb (Location)





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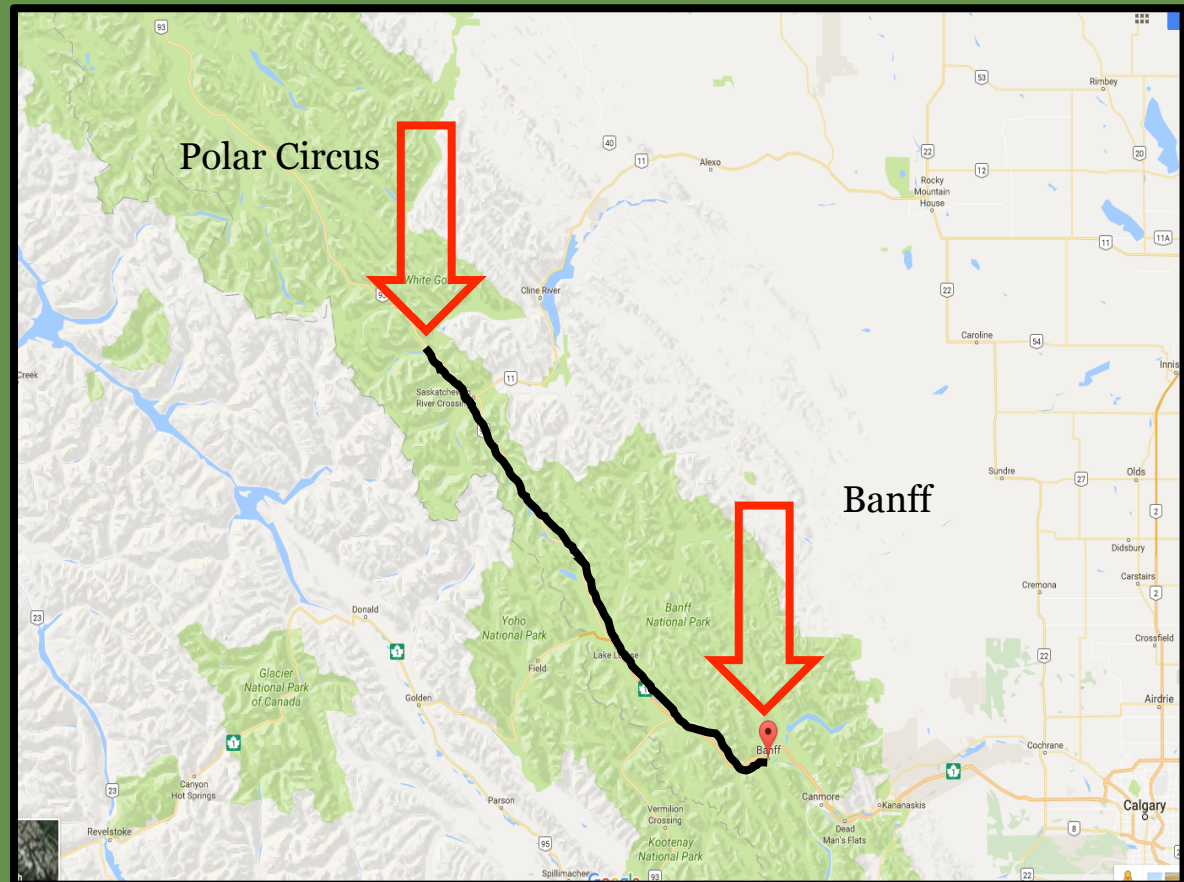




Polar Circus Ice Climb (Location)

Distance from Banff:

- 150 kilometres
- 2-hour drive
- 40-minute flight





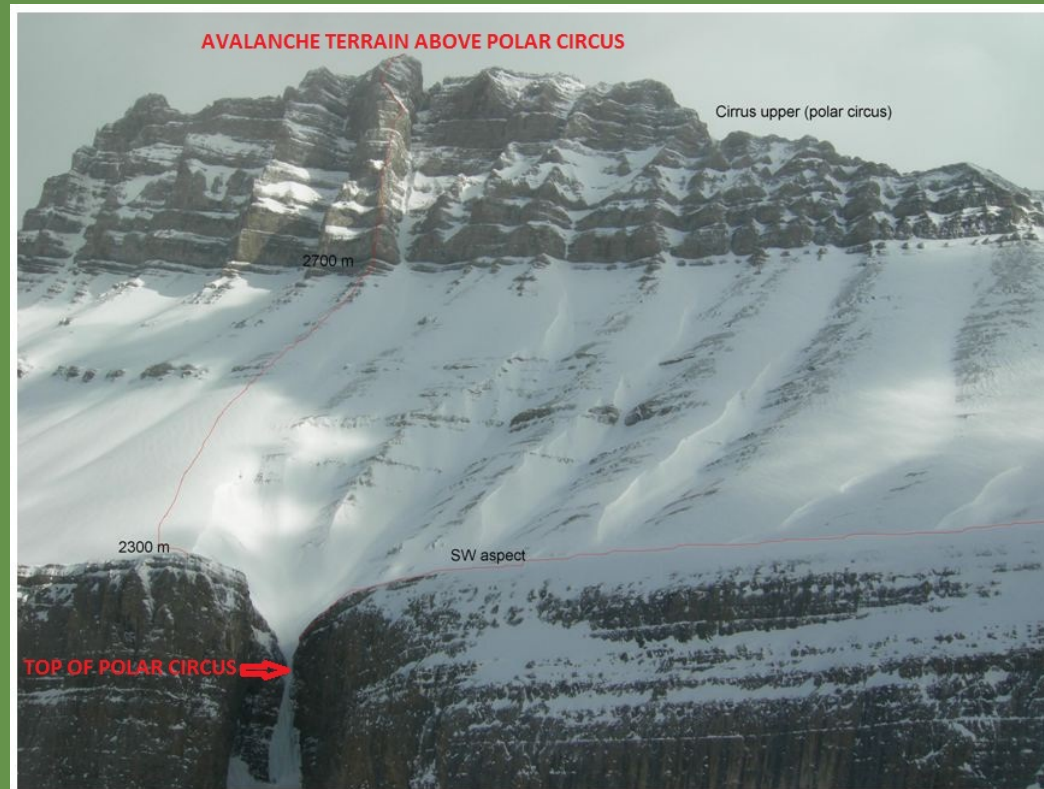
Polar Circus

- 9 pitches, grade 5 ice climb
- 700 metres long
- Significant exposure to avalanche terrain





Avalanche Terrain Above the Route





Timeline of Events

Day 1 (Feb.5, 2015)

- Accident occurred around 5:00 p.m.
- Parks Canada SAR staff notified at 11:30 p.m.
- Significant snowstorm began in late evening.

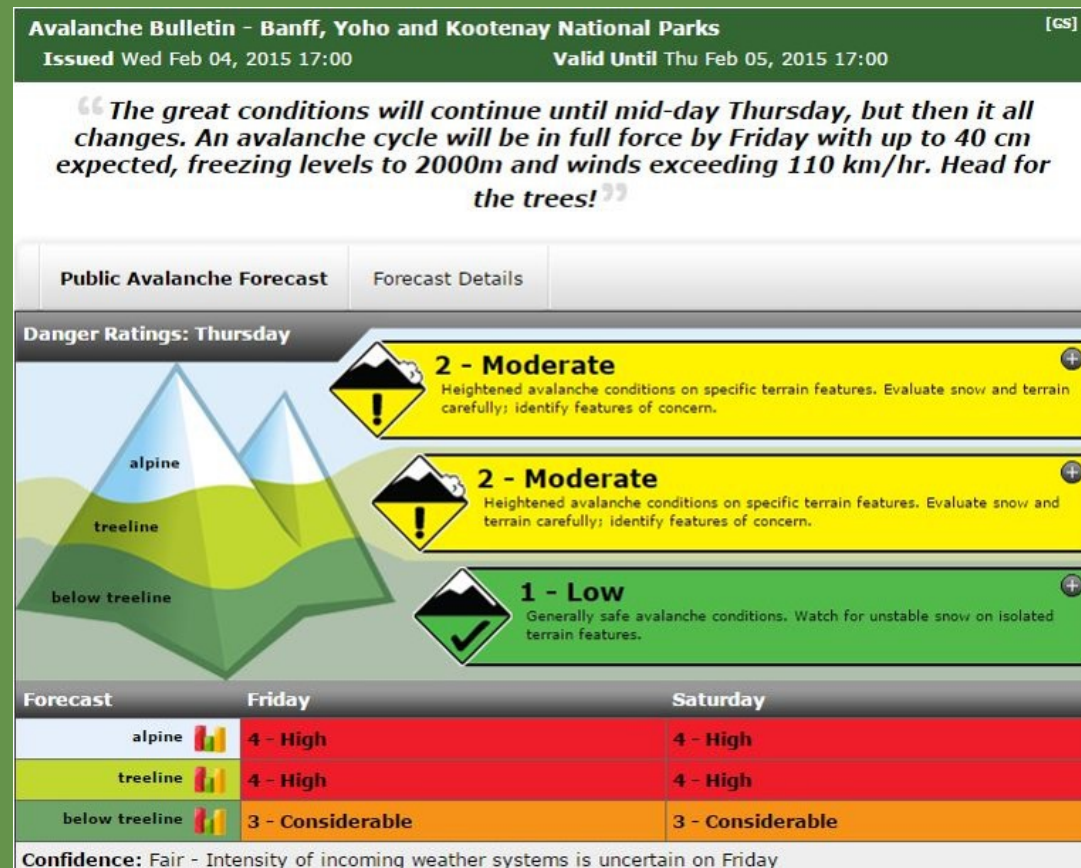




Timeline of Events

Day 2 (Feb. 6, 2015)

- Storm continued. Avalanche hazard rated High.
- A helicopter search was conducted in bad weather. No surface clues were located.
- Victim determined to be deceased.

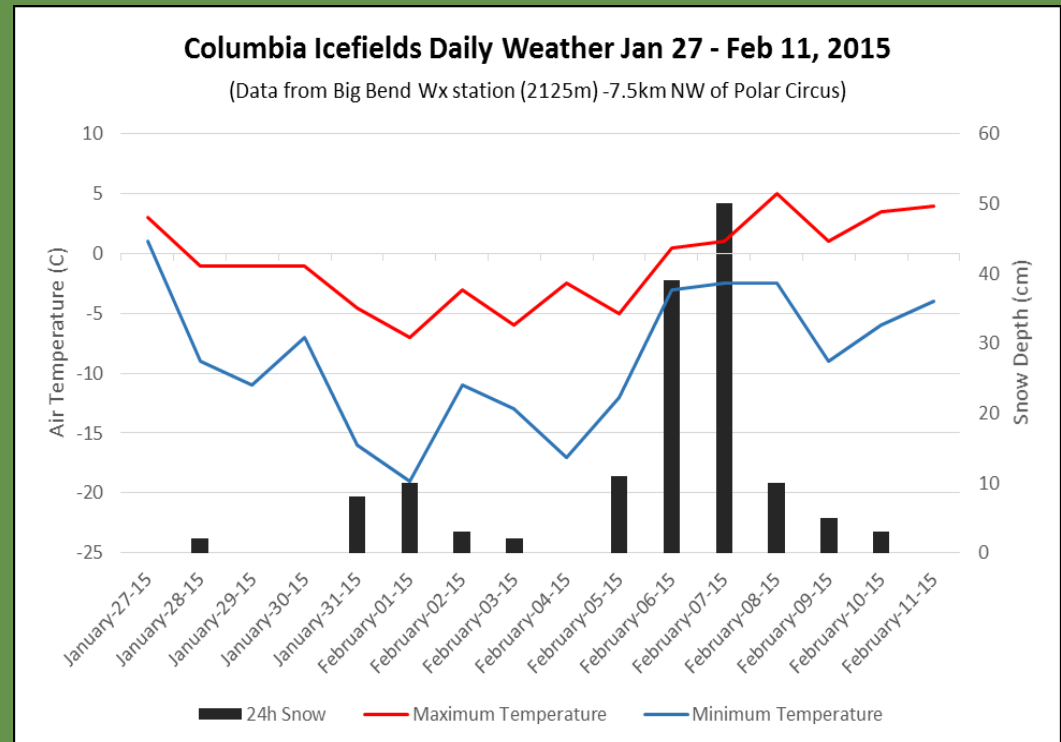




Timeline of Events

Day 3 (Feb. 7, 2015)

- Storm continued. Over a metre of new snow had fallen.
- When weather permitted, avalanche control was conducted on and above route.

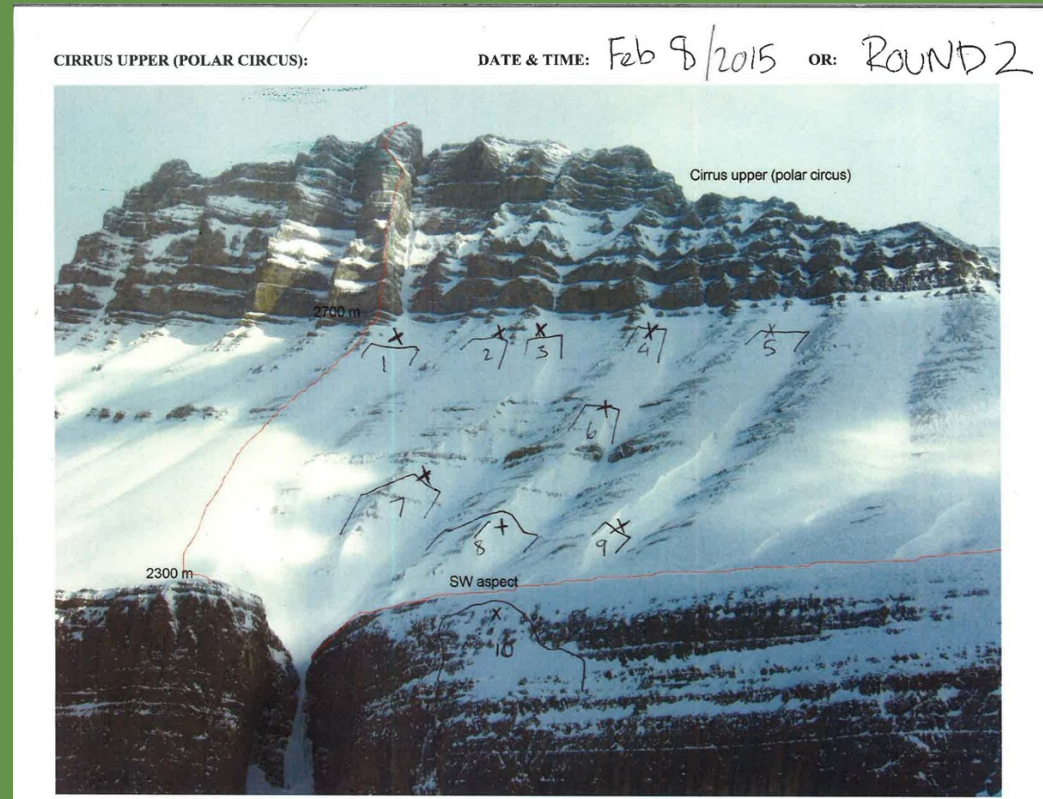




Timeline of Events

Day 4 (Feb. 8, 2015)

- Continued avalanche control.
- 43 explosives deployed.
- Accident site reburied 14 times by avalanches up to size 3.





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Timeline of Events

Day 5 (Feb. 9, 2015)

- Searchers (including 2 dogs) were slung into site.
- Exposed terrain dictated that in some cases searchers had to be put on belay.
- Late in day, a faint Recco signal was detected 200 metres below initial avalanche.





Timeline of Events

Day 6 (Feb. 10, 2015)

- Dog put into area where Recco signal found. Dog gave very faint indication.
- Probing located body 2.8 metres below surface.





Recco reflected off the circuitry of a Mammut headlamp in victim's pack buried 2.8 metres.





In summary, this was a difficult and time-consuming recovery in technical and very high-risk terrain.

Questions that arose as a result of this rescue:

1. How much risk do rescuers accept for a rescue, or in this case, a body recovery?
2. How much time and money does an organization spend on a body recovery?
3. Why are ice climbers not taking avalanche self-rescue gear while on ice climbs like Polar Circus?

