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Local teenager escapes rockfall in the Arctic

August 29 2011 at 12:03pm

Caryn Dolley

A DURBANVILLE teenager has dodged a rockfall while climbing a massive wall in the Canadian Arctic before plunging into the icy sea water when he fell while descending.

Henko Roukema, 19, a maritime navigation student at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, is one of eight young people from around the world participating in South African explorer Mike Horn's Pan Global Adventure for Environmental Action (Pangaea) Young Explorer Programme.

The group, travelling on the yacht Pangaea, is in Nunavut, Arctic Canada, on a three-week expedition that ends early next month.

In a blog post written a few days ago, Roukema described how the group climbed a massive rock wall.

"When I finally got to the portaledges, I was greeted by the best view ever! In the end, we were about 200m above the ground on a vertical wall that just kept on going up! And down it was straight into the water!!!" he wrote.

Roukema said that he and his teammates had to prepare portaledges, tent systems that hang from a single point, in which to sleep.

"I was suddenly awoken by a sound of thunder as big chunks of ice from the glacier across the fjord started falling down the mountain!"

Roukema said the team had been preparing to descend the wall when a rockfall occurred.

"A big one came about 5m away from us, making a loud shooosshh sound," he wrote.

Roukema said the team decided to descend the wall as soon as possible.

"With the big duffel bag between my legs, I had to make sure that it did not hook on to a ledge as I was descending down to the water, there were three points where we had to change to another rope! Then... the bag got stuck on a ledge... with me plummeting a few metres down into the icy cold water... Luckily the rubber duck was there," he wrote.

Last week, he and the team trekked across a glacier and spotted their first polar bear.

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Durbanville resident Henko Roukema, 19, is one of eight young explorers to visit the Arctic region of Nunavut, Canada with world-famous South African explorer Mike Horn.

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