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Accident: Silver Fork Headwall

Tweet [1]
Observer Name:
Todd Glew, Evelyn Lees
Observation Date:
Sunday, February 3, 2013
Occurrance Date:
Sunday, February 3, 2013
Occurance Time:
1:00pm

Region:

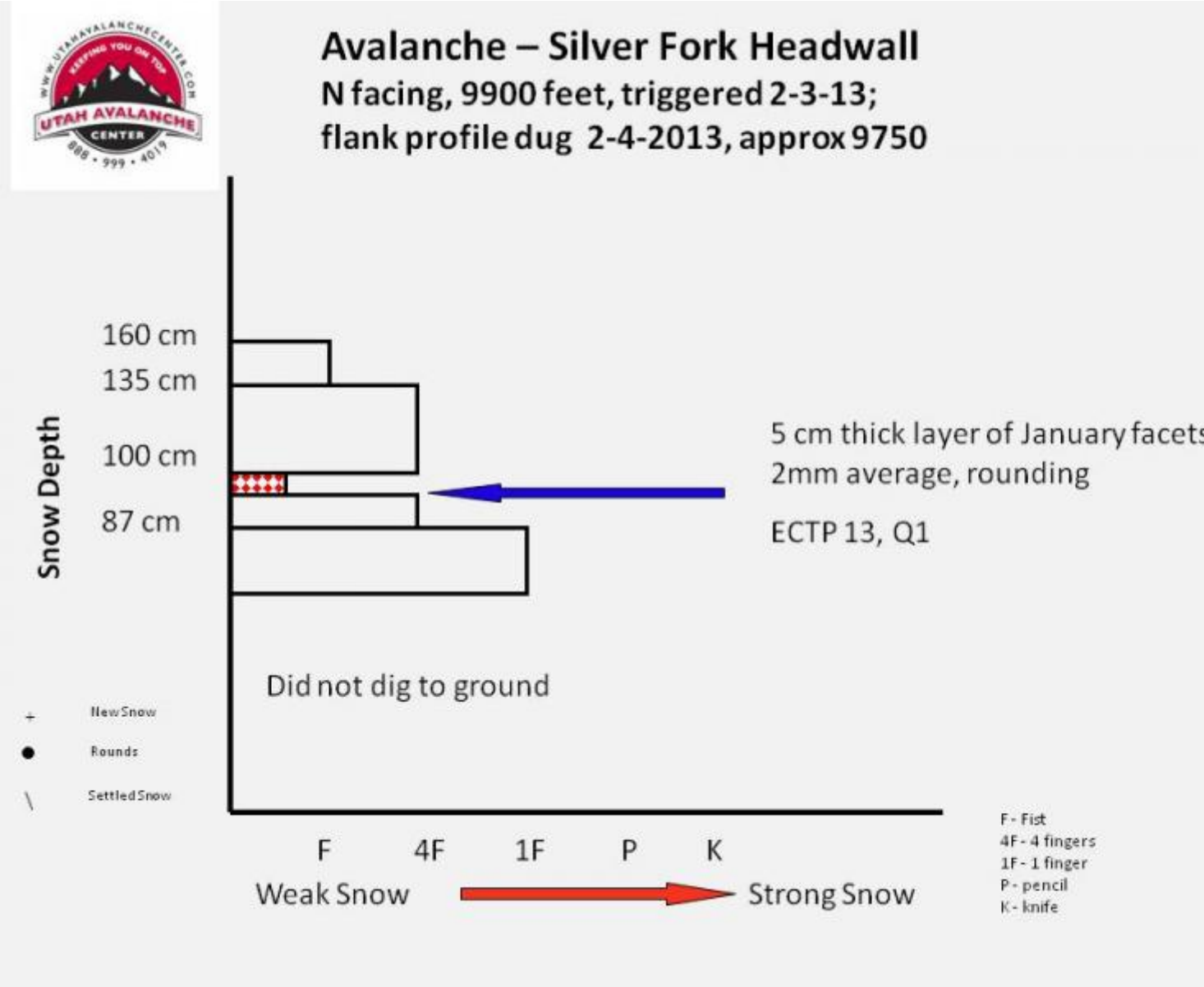
- Salt Lake
- Big Cottonwood Canyon
- Silver Fork
- Silver Fork Headwall

Location Name or Route:
Silver Fork Headwall
Elevation:
9900
Aspect:
North
Trigger:
Skier
Trigger: additional info:
Unintentionally Triggered
Avalanche Type:
Soft Slab
Avalanche Problem:
Persistent Slab
Weak Layer:
Facets
Depth:
2.5'
Width:

200
Vertical:
350
Carried:
1
Caught:
1
Buried - Partly:
1
Buried - Fully:
1
Accident and Rescue Summary:

A party of two skinned up the Emmas from Alta to the Silver Fork ridge line. After a first ,north facing shot, they split up, with one remaining on the skin track to take photos, the other returning to the ridge line. The skier on the ridge line did a first slope cut on the small hanging snowfield above a cliff. He stopped, and then inched forward to start an second slope cut, when a shallow soft slab fractured a couple feet above him. He tried to self arrest, then get out to skiers right, but ended up being carried over the cliff. Hitting the slope below, his skies released (releasable AT bindings) and the weight of the snow and person triggered a second slide that widended out to a large slide on the slope. He was carried down and buried near the toe of the slide. He could wiggle the fingers of one hand and remembers the probe striking him. Initial rescue details are the first hand account below. While there were some hard chunks in the debris, most of the snow involved was a fist to 4 finger hardness soft slab.

Others were able to locate his skies, and wonderfully uninjured, he was able to skin out of Silver Fork and ski down to Alta. A happy ending.



Comments:

I was skinning up West Bowl of Silver Fork and a man (victims friend) near by yelled "avalanche, one caught." I noticed that some of the north side of Silver fork, between West Bowl and Davenport Hill, had just avalanched big. I moved quickly to the accident with my beacon on search, while the victims friend got his probe and shovel ready. I found my lowest beacon signal at 1.0, about 3-4 feet deep. As I found the lowest signal, the victims friend came quickly behind me and on his first probe strike he found the victim. We began shoveling and found the victims hand first. The hand was opening and closing slowly, so I figured the victim was alive. We got to his airway soon there after. We discovered the victim was alive but was not breathing well, was discolored, and his pulse was not strong. A dozen or so people showed up after we dug him up, a few of whom were doctors. Not so long after the victim was excavated, he was walking and talking unscathed. It was glorious.

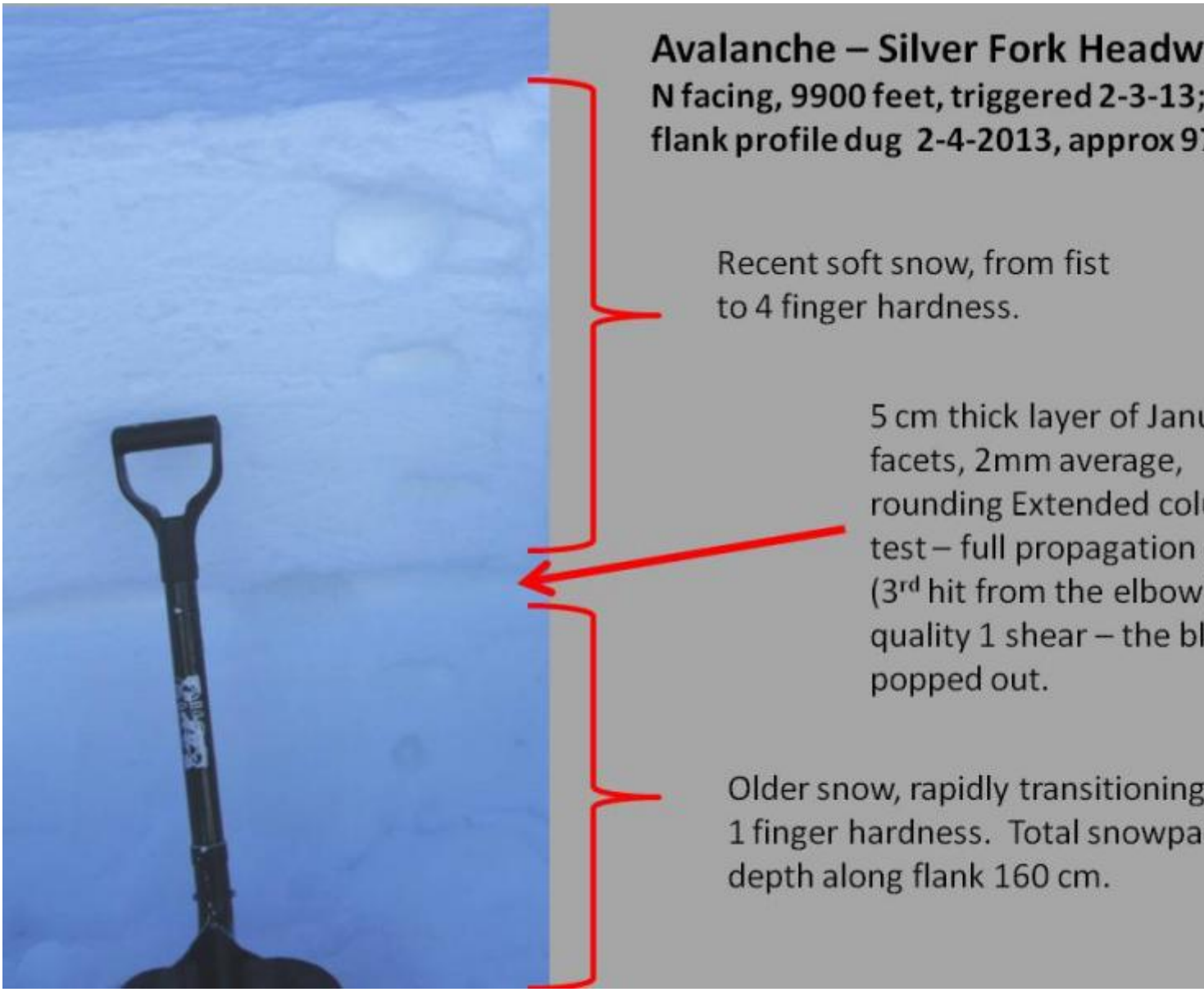
Forecaster notes: the victim was found on his back, face up, laying across the slopes. His arm was up toward the surface, and he remembers being able to wiggle his fingers, hoping they were at the surface. He remembers hearing his rescuers, being hit by the probe, and then "was fading".

He did have an Avalung, and said it was not originally in his mouth. He thought about getting

it into his mouth, but decided to focus on trying to ski out of the slide or dig into the bed surface, When he realized he was caught and going over the cliff, he put it in his mouth. It was clogged with snow, so he took it out to try and clear it, but was never able to get it back in.

Comments:

Upper arrow is where initial slide was triggered off the ridge line, catching the skier, carrying them over the cliff. Lower arrow is a person in a snow pit, for scale.



Comments:

Here is a set of three photos taken by the man's partner as he was caught and going for the ride. It's an amazing way to get the feel of the power of an avalanche, and how it can be about impossible to escape it if you are caught.

Map:
40° 35' 57.6816" N, 111° 37' 31.6956" W
See map: Google Maps [2]

Javascript is required to view this map.

Source URL: http://utahavalanchecenter.org/avalanches/accident-silver-fork-headwall

Links:
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