

These bodies have not been recovered to this day, and it is believed they were carried into and buried deeply in crevasses.

COMMENTS

The route of this climbing party is a frequently used one in summer, and avalanches are not a common summer danger here. This accident clearly illustrates that steep slopes and snow are still the only two requirements for avalanche formation, regardless of the season. Even in midsummer a snow storm at high elevations can approximate winter conditions and quickly develop a hazardous situation. This slide occurred in stable weather, but conditions preceding it are not known. From evidence in the detailed report by the Forest Service, plus examination of photos taken by the rescue party, it appears that new snow had fallen recently.

From the photos and the rather imprecise report of the survivors, it seems likely that a shallow soft slab was artificially released by the weight or motion of the climbing party. The slope over which it fell was long and open, and debris deposition was not deep except in crevasses and on ledges among the ice cliffs. This is a clear example of the heightened degree of avalanche hazard on glaciers, where even a shallow and otherwise harmless slide may claim victims by burying them deeply in crevasses or other natural catchment areas in the broken ice.

This fatal avalanche also emphasizes the importance of keeping a party spaced out at wide intervals while traversing avalanche terrain. A slide only 300 ft. wide which is able to trap an entire party of 25 climbers finds a highly favorable situation for creating fatalities. It might be said that here the odds were all in favor of the avalanche, and only by good fortune did so many survive.

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ALTA, UTAH

1 January 1941

ACCIDENT SUMMARY

On New Year's Day, the ski area was operating but the dangerous avalanche paths, including Greeley Hill, were posted closed due to avalanche danger. (Closures were the only protective measures used at Alta at this time.) Two skiers returning from a tour of Albion Basin chose to reach the ski area by traversing across the middle of Greeley Hill. When the lead man started across this slope, a large slab avalanche broke loose and carried him into the Snakepit, the deep, narrow ravine of Little Cottonwood Creek at the foot of Greeley Hill. His companion was outside the fracture line and escaped. The victim was deeply buried under the snow which funnelled into the narrow gulley.