

COMMENTS

Those who are determined to seek danger in the face of repeated warnings will insure a steady future flow of reports to this and other accident files.

No. 65-2

FARMINGTON CANYON, UTAH

29 January 1965

ACCIDENT SUMMARY

At 8:00 a.m., 29 January, 1965, two research foresters, R.J. and R.D., left the Farmington Experiment Station to take the monthly snow course measurements in Farmington Canyon. After leaving their trucks at Hollingsworth Creek, the foresters continued on two newly-acquired power toboggans. Originally they planned to reach the snow course area via the road to the Farmington Guard Station, but a deep snow drift on the road forced them to abandon that route. At this point the two decided to take an alternate route up the Left Fork of Farmington Creek. Both men were aware of avalanche dangers and had several years of experience working under conditions of this type. R.J. had participated in avalanche studies, but neither was a trained snow ranger. Moreover, the two had checked this alternate route on snowshoes the previous month.

After leaving the road at 11:00 a.m., they started up the creek; the precipitous terrain forced them to travel right in the creek bottom. They were traveling about one hundred feet apart with R.J. in the lead; R.J. was careful to look back every few hundred feet to check on R.D.'s position. Although the two were aware that a considerable snow depth had accumulated in the entire area, they saw no cornices along the ridge tops, nor did they notice any fracture lines on the slopes.

The two men had traveled almost five hundred yards from the main road, when a small snow slide broke to the right of R.D. Hoping to avoid the slide, which was slightly ahead of him, R.D. stopped his machine. A one foot high wall of snow slid to a stop against the vehicle, burying one of its skis, and making it impossible for R.D. to get started again. Since R.J. had checked back just prior to the slide activity, he went on out of sight without observing any of it. After this first slide, R.D. stood on his machine, hoping to get his companion's attention. Suddenly a much larger slide started to tumble towards him. His first impulse was to run, but before he could move, he was caught in the avalanche. Feeling as if he were riding a large wave, he was carried a considerable distance up the opposite slope. As the snow stopped, it pressed in around R.D., leaving him completely buried.