

opened his eyes he saw light. He shouted for help. Wiens, who was almost overhead, heard him and started digging. Katten arrived on the scene from the ridge and helped Suzanne Haertel out of the snow, and then helped Wiens dig for Hovingh. Keller, who was counting people, found all accounted for and helped dig Hovingh free.

By the time all people were out of the snow, it was determined that one man (Hermann Haertel) had a broken or badly injured leg, another (Steortz) had a sprained ankle, and three (Hollander, Hovingh, and Steortz) had lost one ski each. Knowing that additional help could be used to take the injured man out and that the three men with single skis could probably use help, three people (Katten, Delbert, and Carol Wiens) were sent down to advise the sheriff and ask for aid. They left about fifteen minutes after the avalanche, about 1445. They arrived at Solitude Ski Area at 1630 and reported the accident to the ski patrol who, in turn, notified the U.S. Forest Service.

While the three men who had been buried probed for their lost skis (they did not find them), the rest of the party climbed back up the avalanche slope to the injured man. He was suffering intense pain, so much so that it was doubtful that he could be moved while in that condition. He was given a Percodan capsule, a pain relieving drug that was carried for just such an emergency. His skis and poles were used to assemble the emergency toboggan. By the time it was ready, the capsule had taken effect, and his spirits and morale had improved considerably. All excess clothing—mostly sweaters—were used to wrap his injured leg, and it was lashed to his good leg with climbing skins and secured by straps. He was then placed in the toboggan and the cover laced over him. In this position, his injured leg was completely immobile. He was taken from the avalanche slope by four men. At the bottom, they tied four ropes to the toboggan and the long trip down to the Solitude Ski Area began. The time was approximately 1520.

At this time two of the men who had been buried, and who had only one ski each (Hollander and Steortz), were sent ahead so that they could move down Silver Fork at their own pace and attempt to get to the highway before sundown. They arrived at the Solitude Ski Area at 1845.

All party members were at Solitude by about 2130 after a difficult trip. After the injured man reached the hospital and X-rays were taken, it was found that he had no broken bones. Several torn ligaments were repaired

in a subsequent operation, but he was still left with a badly damaged nerve in the leg. The latter accounted for his intense pain on the avalanche slope.

Avalanche Data

The slope on which the avalanche occurred was open and steep (about 37°) and had a northeasterly exposure. The avalanche was classified as SS-AS-4. The entire slope avalanched, being some 1200 feet wide and running a vertical distance of about 400 feet. The 11 skiers who had triggered the slide and who were caught were concentrated in the eastern one-third of the slope.

When the slope failed, there was the loud shot-like report and then the slab shattered into large pieces, some large enough that three skiers remained on top of the snow. The fracture line varied from 4 inches deep to more than 1 foot. Although much loose, light snow was involved, there was no dust cloud, allowing Keller on the ridge above to follow visually many of the skiers as they were trapped. The three men who were completely buried were well below the fracture line when the slide began; the five others that were partly buried were nearer the fracture line.

Comments

In all, 11 skiers were caught in the Silver Fork avalanche; 8 were buried, and 2 injured. Fortunately for the three completely buried victims, they were very near the surface; two had one hand showing and the cries for help of the third were quickly answered.

The snow and avalanche conditions reported to the group by the Forest Service that morning proved to be quite accurate. The Silver Fork slope was on the lee side of the ridge and was an area of localized danger because of wind slab. Shooting reports from Alta and Brighton that came in after the group had left revealed, however, that the avalanche danger was greater than had been suspected, especially near Brighton.

It can be concluded that two factors were primarily responsible for the avalanche. First, the number of people on the slope at one time was excessive; second, the suggestion that several of the skiers ski to the right (east) to gain the protection of the trees was not heeded. The fact the avalanche extended