others in the party, telling them to ski on down. This was the first that the avalanche school knew of the group's presence on the slope. Steve Haber and Hayes immediately started down the slope, Haber in the lead. As he was making a hard jump turn to the right about one-quarter of the way down, the snow fractured above him; this carried him, Hayes, and Peterson down the hill. The fracture line was about 150 feet above Peterson, 35 feet above Haber and 15 feet above Hayes at the moment of release. As the three people were being carried down the hill, LaChapelle directed the avalanche school trainees to follow them with their eyes. One skier was seen to enter a small clump of trees and moments later emerge down the slope. The descent of Hayes was easily followed because she stayed on the surface.

Rescue

As soon as the slide came to rest, the Forest Service personnel marked the last-seen points and began a hasty search of likely areas. One of the trainees immediately went up the hill to a point about 90 feet below the fracture line, where Hayes had come to rest. She was found to be unharmed, though hysterical.

When the avalanche broke, Perla was still in the snow pit. He jumped out immediately, mainly for fear that he would be buried in the pit and only secondarily to aid in the rescue. Nonetheless, he ran toward the moving avalanche, following the path of Peterson who was being carried down the slope. Hence, Peterson was located almost immediately near the toe of the slide by a protruding ski tip. He had come to rest on his back, face up, head downhill, and had managed to clear the snow from around his face as he came to a stop. His legs were buried under about 3 feet of snow; and his head was about 18 inches below the normal snow surface but not covered because of its position between two blocks of snow. His arms were pinned down by his ski poles which were still on his wrists, but he was uninjured and calm when found.

Minutes later groans were heard near one of the small trees about two-thirds of the way from the top of the slope; here, Steve Haber was located. He was found with his head downhill, lying mostly on his side. While being carried along in the slide, he was forced against a tree, with his right ski passing on one side of the tree trunk and his body on the other. The force of the snow had thus put a great amount of force on his right leg. Although he was wearing safety bindings, they were over-tightened and did not release; his right leg was badly broken at boot-top level and was somewhat displaced, causing him severe pain. His legs were under about 40 inches of snow; his head was about 18 inches deep but free of snow because of protection by tree branches.

As Haber was being dug out of the debris, the Forest Service personnel were informed by one of the victims that there were four people to account for in the slide, and probing was immediately resumed for the remaining victim. At this moment Janie Haber appeared at the top of the slope, safe and unharmed. When she had seen the slide release about 5 feet below her, she immediately jumped back to a tree at the top of the slope and had remained hidden there while the other victims were being accounted for. She was very calm, although she later began to show some signs of shock.

As soon as the avalanche occurred, two men were dispatched by LaChapelle to pick up probe poles and a toboggan from the top of the Albion lift. After all victims were accounted for, another man was dispatched to inform the lift operator that no probes were needed. Steve Haber had been dug free and his leg splinted by the time the toboggan arrived. He was evacuated to the ski patrol first aid room at the base of the Wildcat lift pending the arrival of an ambulance from Salt Lake City. At 1620, the ambulance arrived and he was transported to a hospital in Salt Lake City. All rescue operations were secured at 1630.

Avalanche Data

The slide occurred on Never-Sweat Ridge, a fairly short northeast-facing slope and a known slide area. The slope has now been named the Vail Slide in dubious honor of the Vail ski instructors who became the victims. At the release zone, the slope angle is 41°; it flattens to 22° at a transition zone below. The avalanche was classified as SS-AS-3, was 40 yards wide, and ran 120 yards slope distance. The zigzag fracture line was 8 inches deep on the east end and 30 inches deep on the west. The sliding surface was discovered to be an ice layer with a layer of weak ET crystals above and depth hoar below.

Comments

This is the type of accident that is difficult to prevent. With a storm in progress, avalanche hazard was increasing as the day wore