

*1 caught and buried***Weather Conditions**

Snow began falling over the Wasatch Range on December 23 and by the morning of December 27, 33 inches of snow had fallen on the steep slopes of Snowbird. Avalanche control had been carried out routinely during the storm without much activity.

Monday, December 27, was clear with light winds and temperatures in the midtwenties. Avalanche control on this day brought lots of sluffing and a few small avalanches. An unnamed chute in Peruvian Gulch (later named Nye's Chute) was hit in mid-track with a 2-pound charge at about 0830; no avalanche resulted. After all control teams had run their routes, the mountain was opened to the public. No closures were in effect as the result of the control work indicated that the overall avalanche hazard was low.

Accident Summary

Bret Nye, 19, had been skiing in the Snowbird area all morning and shortly before noon left the tram and skied along the ridge toward Baldy. He and three companions entered the steep chute now named Nye's Chute at the top of Peruvian Gulch. The time was 1200. A loud crunching noise was heard as the snow fractured 100 feet upslope of Nye's track. This was a deep avalanche that quickly overwhelmed the skier. His progress in the avalanche was observed for about the first 100 feet of his descent by his companions, but then he disappeared in the churning mass of snow. When the avalanche stopped, there was no sign of Nye. The chute had fractured about 200 feet upslope of the shot left by the morning's control work.

Rescue

The Snowbird ski patrol received word of the slide at 1215. At 1225, a hasty-search group of three patrolmen arrived at the avalanche site and began organizing approximately 20 skiers who had stopped to help. Five minutes

later the main rescue party arrived and several coarse probe lines were established. Approximately 50 rescuers were at the scene at this time.

At 1330, after being buried for 75 minutes, Bret Nye was located by a probe line. He was found about 50 feet above the toe of the avalanche and under 2½ feet of snow. He was lying on his right side with his head downhill. A small airspace was found around his head, and he was taking shallow, gasping breaths. He was obviously cyanotic (blue-colored from lack of oxygen) but showed a good strong pulse. Mouth-to-mouth resuscitation was applied, followed by oxygen. Within 3 minutes, the victim had regained full consciousness. Further examination and questioning revealed no injuries. Nye was taken to a hospital in Salt Lake City for a complete examination and the rescue was terminated at this point.

Avalanche Data

This avalanche was classified as a SS-AS-3; it fractured up to 4 feet deep and dropped about 350 feet of vertical distance. Nye's Chute is a steep, north-facing slope dropping off the ridge between Hidden Peak and Baldy. This chute had been only lightly skied this particular winter, and considerable depth hoar lay at the bottom of the snowpack. Earlier that day, the chute had been shot, but this failed to release the avalanche.

Comments

This accident is another example of post-control release. The 2-pound hand charge was probably thrown a little too low for maximum effectiveness as the avalanche broke nearly 200 feet upslope of the shot point. As with so many post-control avalanches, this one occurred on a lightly skied slope having a weak substratum (i.e., depth hoar).

The victim is very fortunate to have survived a burial of 75 minutes beneath 2½ feet of snow. From his hospital bed, Nye related that he had at first tried to outski the