

lent example of the benefits of even minimal avalanche training. Shawn learned about avalanches and rescue techniques through a snowmobile safety course. "I had to take it if I wanted to ride a snowmobile," he said. Shake was an avid outdoorsman and familiar with the avalanche phenomenon through his association with the local search and rescue team.

Shake analyzed his own mistakes after the accident and used this as a valuable learning experience. He said when he tried to swim out of the avalanche, the rifle he had slung over his shoulder kept dragging him under (as can skis or a snowboard.) Also, the weight of his small backpack made it harder to stay on the surface.

Additionally, he could have crossed the gully higher on the slope, but he thought he would be all right where he was. We believe there is no substitute for good route-finding techniques. When strictly adhered to, this essential skill will keep the backcountry traveller well away from avalanche hazards.

A similar accident, but with a more tragic outcome, was repeated the next day in Idaho. (See accident 82-18 to learn more about it.)

82-18 NOVEMBER 14, 1982

Montpelier, Idaho

1 hunter caught, buried and killed

Weather Conditions

Following some early-season snowfall, 2–3 inches of fresh snow fell with strong winds the day before the accident.

Accident Summary

On Sunday the 14th, Lewis Robison, 32, was hunting deer with fellow hunters. He separated from his companions at 1100 and rode his horse to the top of a ridge. There he tied his horse to a tree, took his rifle and proceeded down across a steep snow-covered slope to look for game.

Robison slogged his way through the drifted snowfield some 20–30 inches deep. The walking, however, wasn't particularly difficult because under the soft slab snow on the surface was weak, granular snow that offered lit-

tle resistance to his legs. In mid stride, the snowpack suddenly collapsed around him and swept him off his feet. He was part way across the slope when the avalanche released and there was no escape. The slide carried him some 600 feet, but it wasn't a rough ride. He fought to keep his head above the snow but it was impossible to stay on the surface. The flow deepened when it reached a gully, turned a corner, and trapped him under 3–5 feet of snow. Robison was in a horrifying situation. He was buried in an avalanche, and no one knew where he was.

Rescue

Later in the day, Robison's friends became concerned and began to look for him. They located his horse and followed his tracks over the ridge to the avalanche. It was now obvious what had happened, and with no exit tracks from the debris, they knew he was still buried somewhere beneath their feet. But it was getting late, and without any surface clues, nor shovels or probes to search with, there was little they could do but go back and report the accident.

At 0730 Monday morning, Dick Epley, a member of the Utah-based Rocky Mountain Rescue Dogs, Inc. and the avalanche advisor for the Intermountain Division of the National Ski Patrol, received a call from the Bear Lake County Sheriff in Idaho. Upon hearing what had happened, Epley arranged for a helicopter from Hill Air Force Base to fly him and his rescue dog, Beau, some 80 miles north to the accident site, just northeast of Montpelier, Idaho. They set down near the site and met Leroy, a Bear Lake Search and Rescue Team member who took Epley and Beau to the top of the avalanche.

Feeling uneasy about some of the remaining snow in the starting zone, Epley positioned Leroy as an avalanche guard and gave the "Search" command to Beau. It was 1025 when Beau put his nose to the snow and went to work. They searched down through the debris and Beau gave a weak alert about 60 feet below the bend in the path. They covered the remainder of the narrow avalanche debris in a few minutes and started back up. At 1045, Beau alerted again in the same spot, but this time he began to dig wildly. This was good enough for Epley. He got out his shovel and helped Beau dig down 3 feet where they found Robison's frozen body. He had died of suffocation.