

hot, and brought climbers, hikers and campers out in droves to the Cascade Mountains to escape the heat. One of those hikers was Jeffrey Wing, 23. On Sunday, May 27, he and two friends were hiking in the Source Lake area near Alpentel Ski Area on Snoqualmie Pass. The Source Lake area has been the scene of several fatal avalanches over the years and posted signs warn of the avalanche danger. According to newspaper accounts, Wing, shirtless and wearing a backpack, took a shortcut through an area posted with avalanche-warning signs. At about 1800 hours, he triggered a small, wet-snow avalanche that carried him over a 100-foot cliff. Searchers recovered his body the next day.

### Comments

Few details were available for this fatal avalanche accident. Like the accident that occurred 9 days before on Granite Mountain (see accident 84-12), warm temperatures, wet snow and late-in-the-day timing can lead to deadly consequences.

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**84-14**

**NOVEMBER 8, 1984**

## Big Cottonwood Canyon, Utah

*1 backcountry skier caught and buried*

### Accident Summary

On November 8, Chris Larson decided to take advantage of a winter storm that was pounding the Wasatch Mountains for some early-season powder skiing. A short write-up in the December, 1984 issue of *The Avalanche Review* briefly told his story.

Traveling alone, Larson left the valley floor of Big Cottonwood Canyon about midday on the 8th. By 1500 hours he had reached the ridgetop where he encountered a raging winter storm. Howling winds and snow falling at a rate of almost 2 inches per hour produced whiteout conditions.

Before starting down, Larson tried to ski-test a couple of slopes, but the storm made it impossible for him to see what affect he was having on the slopes. Playing it safe, he opted for a safer route down a relatively gentle slope.

Near-zero visibility and thick, heavy new snow made the skiing difficult. Also, Larson's early-season technique was a bit rusty and he fell over when he misjudged a small obstacle. While struggling to get back on his feet Larson spotted a small avalanche moving off to his side. He knew it would not reach him, so he calmly went back to his struggle to stand up. What Larson missed was that the small slide triggered the snow above him. It resulted in a second avalanche that would not miss Larson.

The avalanche flowed over him and pinned him face down, spread-eagle. Just before the snow hardened, he was able to create a very small air pocket in front of his face with one hand. But since he was alone an air pocket would do him little good; it would only prolong the inevitable. He had another chance, though. His other arm was outstretched and seemed to be only inches from the surface. He tried to twist and turn it and could move it enough to increase the size of the hole, but he could not reach the surface. Clawing at the snow and on the verge of blacking out, his fingers broke through to the surface. It seemed like a river of fresh air poured into his lungs.

Recharged, Larson worked to free himself. Slowly he could dig under his body, with no place to put the excavated snow he rolled it into small snowballs and threw it out the air hole. After a while he could lower his torso and was able to remove his pack. He used one of the stays to dig. Clumsy, cold hands made the digging even more difficult, but he as able to dig down and free his feet from both bindings. It took almost 3 hours, but finally Larson was able to wiggle out of his tomb.

Free from the snow, Larson had only completed part of his self rescue. After a brief rest he dug out his skis and set out for home. It was tough going, without poles Larson descended through the darkness and storm.

The next day, November 9, in the warmth and security of his home, Larson sipped schnapps and hot chocolate. His body ached from the ordeal the day before; ligaments in his knees and hips were damaged but would heal.

### Comments

When traveling alone in the backcountry there is little, if any, room for error. Larson figures that the avalanche that buried him involved only new snow 6–8 inches deep in an area no more than 30 feet across, yet it almost killed