

Working in the fading light, Accident Site Commander Ron Kidder, also the Loveland Ski Patrol Director coordinated the hasty search. The pack was re-found, but lacking rescuers and facing a large search area in the narrow gully, Kidder assigned people to spot-probe likely burial areas along the curves of the track and runout zones. Meanwhile, he and Johnson climbed up the gully to the starting zone. They found worsening weather, but no additional clues. At about 1820, just as they started down, Kidder got a call on the radio that rescuers had made a probable strike.

About 100 feet above the toe of the debris, a friend of the victim—using a 12-foot probe—hit something, something buried over 10 feet. Other probes gave the outline of a body. That something proved to be a ski boot, and after more than a half hour of digging by over a dozen rescuers, they reached the body. It took rescuers another half-hour of digging before they could free the body.

Rescuers attempted CPR without success. A heart monitor was hooked up, but it showed no activity. Einstahr was pronounced dead at the scene. By 2130, all rescuers and the body were out of the field and the operation was concluded.

The avalanche had stripped Einstahr of his skis, poles, hat, goggles, and gloves and buried him 11 feet, face down. Buried for 6.5 hours, Einstahr had died of suffocation; both his nose and mouth were packed with snow and he had no air pocket. Other than minor lacerations to his head, there was no other trauma or obvious broken bones.

Avalanche Data

The avalanche that the two men triggered was classified as an SS-AS-3-G. It released on the steep north side of Kelso Mountain. The avalanche was actually two parts. The first part was only about 100 feet across where it broke 2–3 feet deep at Johnson's feet. But after running for only a few hundred feet it triggered the failure of a much larger area, up to 500 feet across. The additional snow, channeling into a narrow track and runout zone, resulted in the long-running avalanche that fell 2,200 vertical feet.

Though a fracture line profile was not done, snow conditions on similar aspects at nearby Loveland showed 18 inches of fairly homogenous new snow covering 4–6 inches of well-developed faceted grains. Though it was

not known for sure, there was a good chance that old snow left behind from the previous season was in the starting zone.

Comments

October avalanche accidents in Colorado happen often enough when snows come early. Backcountry enthusiasts must be prepared for avalanches at any time when venturing onto steep snow-covered slopes. Though at times the men thought about avalanches, they had no rescue equipment and were unprepared for an emergency. More importantly they were inflexible in their decision to ski the bowl. That was their objective before they left their vehicle.

84-16
DECEMBER 2, 1984

Park City, Utah

1 backcountry skier caught and partly buried

Weather Conditions

After 9 days of dry weather, winter returned to the Wasatch Mountains late on the 24th of November. At Snowbird Ski Area, about 8 miles southwest of Park City, 51 inches of snow fell from November 25 to December 1. During the storms west to northwest winds averaged 25–35 mph. Skies were clear on the morning of December 2, and at 0630 the temperature was 6°F. Winds were from the northwest and averaged 28 mph, but soon afterwards wind speeds dropped to only 15 mph. Only 2 inches of new snow was reported, all of which had fallen the day before.

Accident Summary

At about 0930, seven experienced backcountry skiers left the Big Cottonwood Canyon road at Silver Fork. The group's goal was the untracked powder to the north—on the other side of the ridge—in Dutch Draw. Using climbing skins the group skied up the south-facing slopes above Willow Heights. Not seeing any recent avalanche activity the group felt the snow was stable. The climb to the ridge—2,000 vertical feet above the cars—went quickly, and in a little under two hours the group was overlooking the fresh powder in Dutch Draw.