

stepped out to become Accident Site Commander. It took four rescuers digging with shovels another 5 minutes to uncover Gregory's face buried 5 feet down.

Hypoxia (or lack of oxygen) had turned Gregory's skin dark blue by the time rescuers had uncovered him. His teeth were shut tight, and snow was firmly packed inside his gums, lips and in his nostrils. When the snow was cleared away from his nose and mouth Gregory started gasping for breath and then to breathe on his own. His color quickly returned to normal. The ski patrol took Gregory down the mountain where an ambulance took him to a nearby hospital. He was kept overnight and released the next day.

With the rescue of Gregory completed the ski patrol's job was only partly finished. Fearful that the avalanche may have caught an unsuspecting skier within the ski area the debris had to be searched. Two separate beacon searches were tried and three avalanche rescue dogs searched the debris but showed no interest. Finally about 100 people probed the entire debris area without results. Satisfied that no one else had been buried the search effort was called off at 1645 hours.

Avalanche Data

Gregory triggered the avalanche on a south-west-facing, 40° slope. The fracture line was 2 feet deep and extended 150 feet across the slope. The avalanche fell 1,200 vertical feet; Gregory was carried about 1,000 vertical feet over trees, rocks, mine dumps and a cliff. The avalanche was classified as an SS-AS-3-O.

Comments

Gregory ended his narrative with a simple sentence, "God or ski patrols watch out for fools." Whether it was divine intervention or the well-trained ski patrollers that saved Gregory, this accident illustrated two important points. Even though Gregory was skiing alone he wore his avalanche beacon and rescuers were able to find him quickly. A beacon left at home or turned off is no good (see accident 85-19). Secondly, this rescue demonstrated why rescuers should always do a beacon search even if it is not known that the victim was wearing a beacon. There is always the chance that someone buried in an avalanche—like Gregory—might be wearing a beacon.

85-9

FEBRUARY 22, 1985

Powder Mountain, Utah

1 out-of-bounds skier caught, buried and killed

Weather Conditions

No detailed weather observations were recorded, but other Wasatch ski areas on the morning of February 22, reported overcast skies and occasional light snows. Only a dusting of new snow had fallen and winds were generally calm. It is likely that the storm that dropped more than 1 foot of snow over the Wasatch earlier in the week (see accident 85-8) also

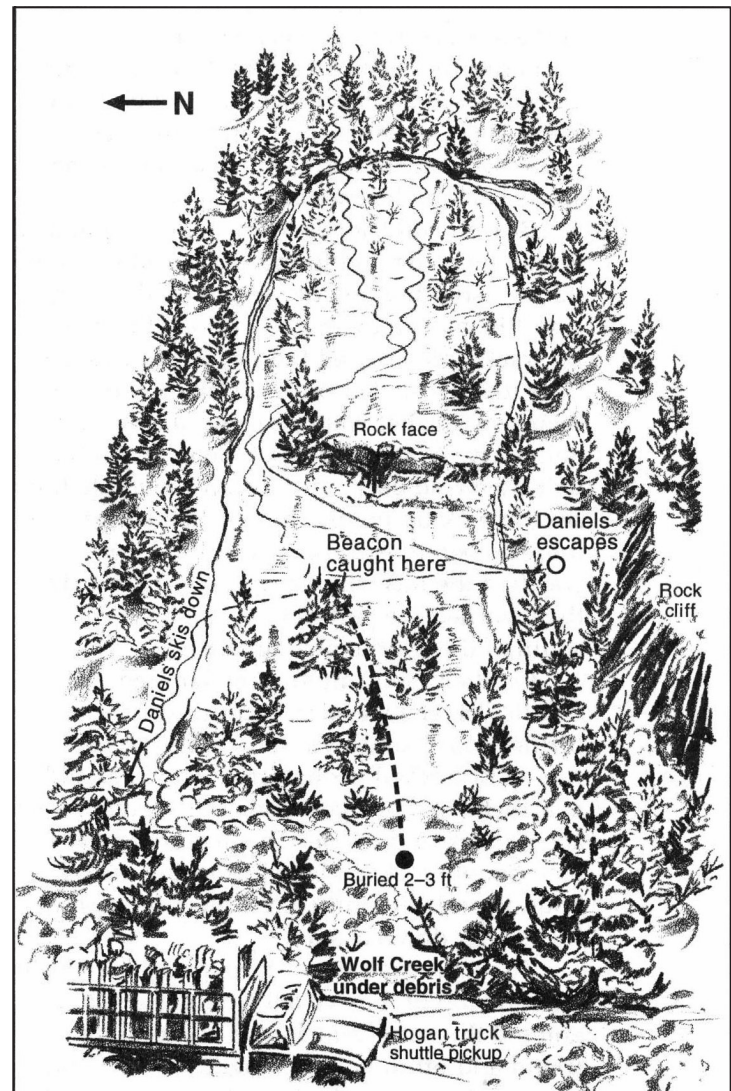


Figure 30. Accident 85-9, Powder Mountain, Utah, February 22, 1985.