

Where the slope steepened, Steven told Susan to wait, and he started down the slope. After about four or five turns, Susan felt the slope collapse, and then she saw the slab break out

with the crown opening up very near where she was standing. She saw Steve sliding down the slope being carried by the slab, facing downhill, sitting down with his skis [sic] out in front of him. Soon he was obscured by the powder cloud and she checked her watch and noticed a time of 1:27 PM.⁴⁹

RESCUE SUMMARY

Susan VanderVoort dropped over the slide's three-foot crown face and skied down to the debris field. She searched the debris field on foot, because she was a beginning skier and could not manage skiing on the uneven surface. She saw no signs of her husband on the surface, so she probed with her ski poles below where his tracks entered the crown and roughly even with the first trees. After a few minutes of fruitless searching, she put her skis back on and started back towards the Brighton Ski Area, yelling for help on the way.

Two different snow professionals heard her shouts and reported the accident to the dispatcher for Solitude Ski Area, who recorded 13:41 as the time they were notified of the accident. One was a ski patroller from Solitude, John Dunlea, who was on the Solbright Trail, a ski trail connecting the Brighton and Solitude resorts. Dunlea remained in voice contact with Susan. The second was a guide heading from Solitude to Alta Ski Area.

Two hasty parties—a heli-ski guide from Wasatch Powderbirds and two patrollers from Solitude—arrived at the site at 13:52 and began a transceiver search for Steven VanderVoort. Less than ten minutes later, the Powderbirds helicopter was back with a team from Snowbird Ski Area that included a dog named Leal, two ski patrollers, and a doctor. A team from Brighton arrived at 14:05, and Susan VanderVoort made it back to the site at the same time. She reported that her husband was not wearing a beacon, so rescuers switched to organized probing in the likely burial area.

Powderbirds' helicopter continued ferrying rescuers to the scene, and several more rescue teams skied to the site from Brighton Ski Area. By 14:40, there were rescuers and dog teams on site from four different ski areas. The last team to arrive was from Alta Ski Area and included Titus Case and his dog, Crystal.

At 14:50, Crystal alerted near the bottom of the debris, and Solitude patroller Jeff Larson confirmed the find with a probe strike. Rescuers excavated VanderVoort within minutes from under two to three feet of debris on the downhill side of a large spruce tree. He was lying on his right side, face-up, still wearing one ski. Rescuers began CPR, and roughly 30 minutes later, an air ambulance flew his body from the site.

VanderVoort did not suffer significant trauma. He was buried nearly 90 minutes and died from asphyxiation. A doctor at the scene estimated that he had been dead just 15 minutes when rescuers uncovered him.

AVALANCHE DATA

The crown face of the avalanche was 180 to 200 feet across and up to three feet thick. The slide failed on top of the weak, faceted snow that formed in December, but did not step down to older basal facets. The UAFC investigator noted that the overlying slab was "very hard and dense snow (pencil hardness and forty percent density) and...rigid enough to allow him [VanderVoort] to get well out into the area which eventually avalanched before it failed."⁵⁰