

For the third year in a row, avalanche fatalities this season were lower than the five-year average. Fatalities in Colorado, again, accounted for half of the fatalities. Three of the four accidents followed significant storms and obvious avalanche cycles. The other, the third of the accidents, came during a dry spell with relatively few avalanches.

The accident in Alaska was the first in this volume involving children at play.

Two of the Colorado accidents and the accident in California all involved sidecountry riders. These riders left ski areas to recreate in the nearby backcountry. They brought strong riding skills, but apparently little avalanche awareness.

19891125 **TONY GROVE LAKE, NORTHEAST OF LOGAN, UTAH |**

November 25, 1989

One backcountry tourer caught and killed. Other skiers discovered his body six months later.

SITE

Tony Grove Lake is in the Bear River Range of northern Utah. The paved road to the lake was not maintained for winter driving, but cars could access the lake in the early winter. Therefore, the slopes south of the lake are popular for early season backcountry tours. Later in the winter most access is by snowmobile, and the slopes are popular for highmarking.

WEATHER AND SNOWPACK SUMMARY

“Red flag”
indications
of danger

The first snow of the season came on October 28, with a foot or two of snow falling in the Tony Grove area. Most of November remained dry with little snow. The snow on the ground became faceted and weak. Snowfall started again on November 24. About a foot of snow fell overnight. November 25 had “fairly nice weather,”¹ but that night, the storm intensified and would become one of the largest storms of the season. On November 25, the snowpack was “probably a foot of new snow overlying perhaps a foot of old recrystallized [faceted] snow.”²

ACCIDENT SUMMARY

Traveling
alone

Mark Miller (24) was an avid and expert skier. On November 25, he was one of several backcountry tourers enjoying the first significant snowfall of the winter. Miller was alone, but on the ridge south of Tony Grove Lake, he met his friend Todd Hibner. Miller said he was proceeding further out the ridge, towards Mount Naomi. That was the last time Miller was seen alive.

RESCUE SUMMARY

When Miller did not return that night, two friends drove to Tony Grove Lake. Around midnight, they found Miller’s car there and followed his tracks south towards the ridgeline. The storm was intensifying, and they lost Miller’s tracks in the blowing snow.