

RESCUE SUMMARY

Rescuers arrived shortly after the 911 call and saw “a gravel pit filled with snow...The fallen avalanche ran parallel with the cliff and was about 200 yards long. There were no kids in sight.”

Rescuers started a somewhat haphazard search. One pair spotted a glove, and dug out the second of the three boys about 25 minutes after the avalanche. “He was breathing and alive, and that gave us hope.”

The first boy returned to the scene and was able to provide rescuers with last-seen locations. Several rescuers were already digging and spot probing in the area he identified. A shoveler struck the third boy in the head about 35 minutes after the avalanche. “I realized that the boy...was my son. He was talking and breathing and I knew he would be alright,” one rescuer said.

Rescuers continued to excavate in the last-seen area and found the fourth boy about 40 minutes after the avalanche. He was unconscious but breathing. He was hospitalized and treated for “hypothermia and a traumatic respiratory condition.”

COMMENTS

Although avalanche accidents are most common in the western United States, records include several narrow escapes like this one in the Midwest. The fact that all four boys survived is likely due to several factors: the lucky fact of one boy not being completely buried, the prompt rescue he initiated, and his memory of the last-seen locations. The fact that the initial survivor could hear his friends calling for help suggests that the debris that buried them was soft, allowing for more air spaces around the buried boys and giving them more time to be rescued.

MONTPELIER CANYON, NORTHEAST OF MONTPELIER,

19970111a

IDAHO | January 11, 1997

One snowmobiler caught, buried, and killed

ACCIDENT SUMMARY

A group of three or four snowmobilers was riding in the Fox Spring area in Montpelier Canyon in southeastern Idaho. Two of the riders were on a ridgeline while a third highmarked a steep, north-northwest facing slope below a cornice. The highmarking rider triggered the avalanche around 11:30. He tried to ride out the side of the avalanche but was swept away.

RESCUE SUMMARY

The other riders searched for their friend. Other snowmobilers joined the search and probed the avalanche debris all afternoon. They found the snowmobile but not the rider. Search and Rescue was paged out around 14:00, with assistance from ski patrollers at Pine Creek Ski Area. Searchers arrived at the avalanche site around 16:00.

Three dog teams from American Search Dogs, based in Utah, arrived at the avalanche around dark. One of the dogs alerted at the base of a tree about 40 feet uphill of the snowmobile’s location. A probe strike confirmed it was the buried rider’s body. The rider was buried about two feet deep, wrapped around a tree.

**No rescue
equipment**

AVALANCHE DATA

The avalanche was a hard slab, triggered by the snowmobiler. The slope faced north-northwest, was very steep, and had an “overhanging cornice at the top.” The avalanche broke four to five feet deep and about 600 feet wide. Debris piled up about 10 feet deep.

COMMENTS

This accident illustrates the importance of two common avalanche safety messages: Get the gear; Get the training. This party was traveling without avalanche rescue equipment—avalanche transceiver, shovel, and probe. The lack of rescue tools made it very difficult to effect a timely companion rescue. It’s not clear what avalanche safety training the party had, or whether anyone in the party identified the slope the victim highmarked as a potentially dangerous avalanche slope. Basic avalanche safety training can help recreationists to recognize and avoid avalanche terrain. In this case, the slope’s steepness, the cornice, and the aspect were all signs of potential avalanche danger.

19970111b

DRY CANYON, WEST OF LOGAN PEAK, UTAH

January 11, 1997

Three backcountry tourers caught, buried, and killed while camping

High
avalanche
danger

WEATHER AND SNOWPACK CONDITIONS

A rain crust, up to five inches thick, formed on January 1 and 2, 1997. Snowfall in the following week added about six inches of snow above the crust. The snow faceted and formed “recrystallized powder” by the morning of January 11.

A storm began January 11. About a foot of snow fell during the day. A cold front with strong northwest winds arrived around 18:00. The weather station on Logan Peak, less than a mile to the east, recorded 25 to 50 mph winds from the northwest with frontal passage. An additional foot of snow fell the night of January 11.

ACCIDENT SUMMARY

On January 11, a group of three friends, Max Lyon (38), Keith Maas (36), and Karl Mueggler (29), left for several days of backcountry skiing and winter camping in the Bear River Range of northern Utah. All three were experienced backcountry skiers and mountaineers and very familiar with the terrain around Logan Peak. They were anticipating the oncoming storm and the improving ski conditions. Sometime during the night of January 11, a large natural avalanche overran their campsite and buried all three men.

RESCUE SUMMARY

The group was reported overdue on January 13. Authorities dispatched Cache County Search and Rescue that evening. A hasty party noted avalanche debris in Dry Canyon, and a search team was dispatched at 21:00. Information from the hasty party and from witnesses who had seen the trio on January 11 helped searchers locate the avalanche debris by 22:30.

One of the trio had left his avalanche transceiver on overnight. Rescuers were able to quickly locate the burial site in thick timber about 150 feet above the toe of the ava-