

19970125

THE FANG, PROVO CANYON, UTAH | January 25, 1997

Two climbers caught and partially buried; one injured, one killed

WEATHER AND SNOWPACK CONDITIONS

At the time of the accident, rain was falling at the elevation of the ice climb and heavy snow was falling at higher elevations.

ACCIDENT SUMMARY

The Fang (II, WI5) is an ice climb on the north-facing side of Provo Canyon, in the southern Wasatch Range. A natural avalanche hit two ice climbers around 12:45. They were swept off the climb and fell over 300 vertical feet. Doug Hall, (27) was killed by massive trauma. Scott Lee (25) was injured and hospitalized.

RESCUE SUMMARY

Another party of three climbers was about 250 feet below Hall and Lee. The avalanche passed over the second group and left them unscathed. They called 911, immediately rushed to the deposition area, and uncovered the two climbers. The two were partially buried with their rope still attached. Hall did not respond to CPR. The three extracted and stabilized Lee. Utah County Search and Rescue, assisted by Sundance Ski Patrol, arrived around 13:00 and evacuated Lee.

AVALANCHE DATA

The rain saturated the new snow and a relatively small pocket of snow above the climb released, sweeping the climbers off the ice.

Wet Slab
avalanche

COMMENTS

The Fang ice climb sits below a large wooded bowl. Any avalanches in the bowl funnel straight into the ice climb. This is typical of avalanche accidents involving ice climbers. Climbers tend to be impacted by natural avalanches more frequently than other recreators.

This was the sixth avalanche fatality in Utah for the 1996-97 season—the largest number in a single winter since 1950. There were also six fatalities in 2000-01, and eight in 2005-06. During the period of this volume, Utah averaged three to four fatalities a winter.
