

STRAIGHT FORK, EAST OF MOUNT PLEASANT, UTAH

19980117a

January 17, 1998

One snowmobiler buried and killed

WEATHER AND SNOWPACK CONDITIONS

Mid-January 1998 was very stormy in Utah. Storms began on January 9, with a rapid rise in avalanche danger and numerous avalanche accidents in northern Utah.

ACCIDENT SUMMARY

Skyline Drive is a high-elevation road that runs near the crest of the Wasatch Plateau in central Utah. The bowls and basins on either side of the are popular with snowmobilers. On January 17, Cody Dyches (23) was snowmobiling with friends in the upper end of Straight Fork, east of Mount Pleasant. Someone in the group triggered an avalanche around 17:00. Dyches was caught and buried.

RESCUE SUMMARY

Dyches' friends were unable to locate him. Search and Rescue teams brought in avalanche search dogs. The dogs alerted on Dyches' location, and searchers excavated his body around 21:30. He had been buried under about five feet of avalanche debris.

No rescue
equipment

COMMENTS

January 17 and 18 were a deadly two days in the western U. S. Seven snowmobilers were killed in five accidents. All five accidents involved parties that could not conduct timely companion rescues because the victims were not wearing avalanche transceivers and the party was not carrying avalanche rescue gear. In some cases, the victims were buried deeply and may not have survived even if they'd been excavated quickly. Nonetheless, the similarities among the accidents are disturbing. Two days. Five accidents. Seven people killed. No avalanche transceivers.