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Man survives avalanche, 1,000-foot fall



KEVIN LEE/The Daily Herald

Survivor: 22-year-old Joseph Soelberg is led away with rescue personnel after surviving a 1,000-foot fall in Lost Canyon on Mt. Timpanogos Thursday evening.

By **DONALD W. MEYERS**
The Daily Herald

PROVO CANYON — Riley Siddoway and Joseph Soelberg thought climbing part of Mount Timpanogos would be a great way to celebrate the end of finals week at Brigham Young University.

Instead, Soelberg got the ride of his life Thursday evening as two avalanches carried him 1,000 feet down the side of the mountain. Miraculously, he suffered only a few cuts and scrapes.

"I'm probably not (going climbing) for a long time," said a grateful-to-be-alive Soelberg,

who was plucked off the mountain by a helicopter pilot.

Soelberg said he and Siddoway decided to climb in the Lost Canyon area, across the Provo Canyon Highway from the Bridal Veil Falls overlook, as a way to mark the end of finals week and take advantage of the warm weather. They started their climb at 5:30 in the morning, armed with crampons and other climbing equipment.

They reached a ridge around noon and were heading down around 2:30 p.m. when the slide hit. The Utah County Sheriff's Office believes the slide was triggered by the recent warm weather that destabilized the



DAVID KENNARD/The Daily Herald

snow pack.

Siddoway said he watched from the ridge as the avalanche swept his best friend 1,000 feet

down the mountain from the 9,500-foot level. When Soelberg finally came to a rest, he waved to his friend to let him know he was all right.

Soelberg said the only warning he had that the avalanche was coming was a rumbling noise like thunder. He was actually swept down by two avalanches. The second slide was the one that made Soelberg think he was a goner, since it took him over a few small cliffs, he said.

After he saw his friend carried down the mountain, Siddoway knew he had to act fast to find help.

RESCUE

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"I just ran down the mountain as fast as I could," Siddoway said. "I didn't think I could get down that fast." His descent took 35 minutes, a third of the time it would normally take, he said.

Once on the ground, he decided to get help by driving to the Provo Police Department, where he said he knew he could

get some assistance.

The Utah County Sheriff's Office and its Search and Rescue Team responded. Lt. Jim Tracy said the unstable snow conditions, coupled with the wind and a storm front moving into the area, made sending a ground crew to Soelberg's position impossible.

Bill Stapely, a helicopter pilot who was ferrying a television news crew to the site, offered to go up and pluck Soelberg from the slopes.

"He had the skill and the

machine, so we granted him permission," Tracy said, adding that the LifeFlight helicopter pilot on the scene seconded the idea.

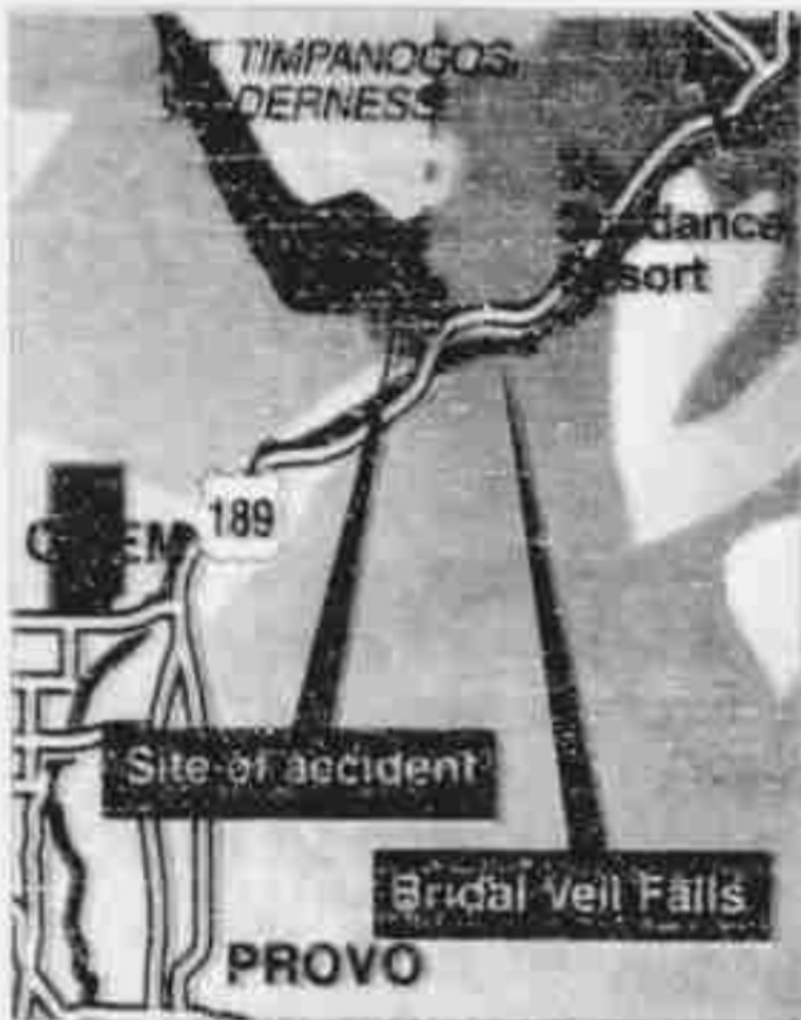
Soelberg said when he saw the helicopter, he knew he was going to be saved. He grabbed hold of the chopper's landing skid and a passenger in the cabin pulled him aboard.

"It was a miracle," Siddoway said, after his friend was safely on the ground. Soelberg was treated on the scene and released.



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