

From Deseret News:

Crews recover body of avalanche victim

MONTPELIER, Idaho -- The body of a southern Idaho man buried in an avalanche since Saturday afternoon was recovered by search and rescue crews Sunday morning.

Douglas "Cory" Weston, 25, St. Charles, Idaho, was killed in a slide that started Saturday at 2:15 p.m. when Weston and a Utah friend were backcountry snowmobiling in the St. Charles Main Canyon area.

The Utah man, whose name was not released, escaped the slide but Weston was engulfed. The Bear Lake County Sheriff's Office, Bear Lake County Search and Rescue, American Search Dogs, the Bear Lake State Parks Department and several private citizens searched the slide area on sleds and snow cats. Search dogs were able to pinpoint the location of Weston's body at 10:15 a.m. under 6 feet on snow. A sheriff's report noted Weston was an experienced snowmobiler.

Ethan Green, spokesman for the National Forest Service, said mild temperatures have helped the recent snowfall settle but there is still a danger for hard slab avalanches -- like the one that caught Weston. Hard slabs develop from cold winds blowing across new snow, which forms a crust above softer snow underneath.

From 1999-2000 UAC Annual Report:

Fatality near Montpelier, Idaho Two snowmobilers were high-marking a narrow gully below a steep, wind-loaded bowl in the mountains west of St. Charles, Idaho. One snowmobiler got his machine stuck and the other came up to help him when their weight triggered the avalanche. The one who came up to help was able to outrun the avalanche at over 80 mph, while his friend was buried. Neither had beacons or shovels.

The surviving snowmobiler probed using tree branches for about 15 minutes before going for help. An organized rescue crew found the body of the missing snowmobiler the following day. This exact setup is the common denominator in about two thirds of all snowmobile fatalities in the U.S.

Once again, even a small amount of avalanche education would have saved his life: one-at-a-time, carry beacons and shovels, stay out of gullies, be cautious after recent snow and wind, call the avalanche advisory—all simple concepts, but without basic avalanche knowledge like the above two examples, eventually, there will be a story without a happy ending.

Our staff puts in many hours of unpaid overtime each season just to try and reach the people who really need avalanche education and information. But we obviously can't reach them all.