

Medical Center in Anchorage, and spent all afternoon in surgery for a crushed pelvis, other internal injuries, and bleeding. Surgery could not save his life; Brookman died that night.

AVALANCHE DATA

**Wind Slab
avalanche**

This avalanche released at an elevation of about 2,800 feet and fell to sea level. An air blast likely accompanied the high-speed snow, which increased its destructive potential. The avalanche was classified as HS-N-R5-D4.

COMMENTS

Avalanche forecasting is far from an exact science. Forecasters at ski resorts, heli-ski operations, in the backcountry, and on highways and railways are faced with daily—even hourly—decisions. They combine data on terrain, weather, and snowpack to assess avalanche danger levels. Based on that information, they can use explosives to lessen or eliminate the danger, but with full knowledge that explosive mitigation is also not an exact science; it may work 99% of the time, but 99% is not 100%. Lastly, there is always pressure—sometimes enormous pressure—to get a ski area or highway open. On this day, the helicopter bombing mission produced very little and gave the forecasters an indication that the danger had diminished.

Therefore, it is hard to find fault with the decision to proceed with the snow-clearing operation. A small window of opportunity opened with a break in the storm. However, when the wind resumed, that window slammed shut. Blowing snow began reloading the avalanche starting zones, and the avalanche danger increased by the minute. At that point, the forecasters needed to recognize conditions had change for the worse and a decision to halt the operation was warranted.

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ST. CHARLES CANYON, WEST OF ST. CHARLES, IDAHO

February 19, 2000

Two snowmobilers caught; one buried and killed

WEATHER AND SNOWPACK CONDITIONS

In mid-February, sustained snowfall and a powerful wind event hit the Bear River Range, west of Bear Lake in southeast Idaho. The snowfall started about February 10, and about four feet of snow accumulated over the next nine days. On the 14th, a significant wind episode produced average winds of 30 mph from the west-southwest but with gusts estimated at nearly 100 mph. On the 19th, the Utah Avalanche Center's Logan-area forecast—which covers the southern end of the Bear River Range—was still warning of the lingering threat of unpredictable hard slabs.

ACCIDENT SUMMARY

**More than one
person on a
slope**

St. Charles is a small town on the shores of Bear Lake in southeast Idaho. St. Charles Canyon is one of several canyons that leads west and provides access to the Bear River Range. On Saturday, February 19, two snowmobilers were riding on the slopes in the Middle Fork of St. Charles Canyon. At about 13:40, they were highmarking in a narrow gully below a steep, wind-loaded bowl. One rider became stuck near the top of the