

30 to 50 degrees. Where the victim's ski tracks entered the fracture line, the slope angle was 35 degrees. The slab layer comprised one-finger and four-finger-hard snow, and it was classified as SS-ASu-R3-D2-O.

**Persistent Slab
avalanche**

COMMENTS

This was an experienced group who knew the terrain well. They were knowledgeable about the avalanche potential, carried full rescue gear in case of emergency, and were skiing cautiously, given the known avalanche conditions. But the danger increases when trees dot an avalanche slope. As in this case, an otherwise survivable avalanche becomes deadly.

The victim's route—cutting across the steepest part of the convex roll—was perhaps the only bad decision the group made this day.

The victim was a well-respected teacher in Crested Butte. Her death was a terrible loss for her husband, friends, and the community.

RED ROCK CLIFFS, NORTHWEST OF CANYONS VILLAGE

20010227

AT PARK CITY, UTAH | February 27, 2001

Four sidecountry skiers caught; two partly buried, two buried, one killed

WEATHER AND SNOWPACK CONDITIONS

The winter of 2000-01 was characterized in the Wasatch by a thin and unusually weak snowpack. An initial stormy period in early November produced several feet of snow cover that faceted into depth hoar during clear spells in late November and December. This weakening process was coupled with a lack of major storms that might have eliminated the weak layers by natural avalanching. Throughout the second half of January and all of February people triggered numerous avalanches in the Wasatch backcountry. Several small storms loaded extra weight on the weak layers, keeping the avalanche danger at Moderate and Considerable from mid-January to February 23. During the weekend preceding the accident—February 24 and 25—the east side of the Wasatch received about 16 inches of new snow, fitting the seasonal profile of a small storm increasing the danger. On February 24, the danger bumped to High, and then returned to Considerable for February 25 through 27.

ACCIDENT SUMMARY

On Tuesday, February 27, a party of seven skiers and snowboarders planned a backcountry tour from what was then known as Canyons Ski Resort. They rode to the top of the Ninety-Nine 90 ski lift and exited the ski area through a backcountry access point at about 11:30. The party traveled northwest along the ridgeline, passing over a high point known as Square Top, to the Red Rock Cliffs area. Red Rock Cliffs is a steep slope that funnels into a narrow, winding gully. It is an avalanche area, with starting-zone slope angles of 35 to 45 degrees. Locals rarely ski the area because of the nature of the slope—a steep starting zone above and a terrain trap below.

Upon reaching the Red Rock Cliffs, Andy Reinfurt, one of the group members, was concerned about the cornice that hung above the slope they wished to descend. He continued to travel to the northwest along the ridge, attempting to get a full view of the cornice. Before Andy returned, Sharon Reinfurt (43) decided she wanted to return