

Lost hiker's body found; second is presumed dead

By JASON BERGREEN
The Salt Lake Tribune

BIG COTTONWOOD CANYON — Friends and family were optimistic Bruce Quint would be found alive until searchers Sunday recovered the body of his hiking partner from an **avalanche** site in Big Cottonwood Canyon.

Quint and Melvin Denis were reported missing Saturday evening when they failed to return from snowshoeing near Mineral Fork.

The body of Denis, a 32-year-old University of Utah medical student, was found about 11:30 a.m. Sunday by a search and rescue dog. He was buried in 3 to 5 feet of snow, where helicopter searchers had spotted snowshoe tracks the day before.

Denis' girlfriend, Alison Schiffern, and members of Quint's family hugged and comforted one another near the side of the mountain Sunday where searchers had set up a command post. The news of Denis' death put a damper on any hope of finding Quint alive.

"I think he's been lost," Quint family friend Drew Hall said. "We're all pretty realistic about what's happened. We were optimistic until they found Mel's body."

Quint's brother-in-law Norman Le Fevre echoed Hall.

"We've lost two wonderful people," Le Fevre said. "I assume we've lost Bruce."

Saturday's **avalanche**

See **AVAILANCHE**, A6

claims hikers

● Continued from A1

occurred at an altitude of about 9,400 feet. It was about 3½ miles from the nearest road and was about 300 feet wide, Salt Lake County sheriff's Sgt. Rosie Rivera said.



Bruce Quint

The conditions in the Wasatch Mountains have made the area prone to avalanches, and Denis' death was the third confirmed avalanche death in Utah since Friday.

The area was so dangerous rescuers ignited 45 explosions to trigger potential avalanches before beginning the main search about 10:45 a.m. Sunday morning, Rivera said.

Denis and Quint were training Saturday for a May hike up Shisma Pangma, a 26,000-foot mountain in the Himalayas, when the avalanche fell. They did not have avalanche beacons.

Quint was the executive director of Community Development Corp. of Utah, which builds homes in Salt Lake City for low-income families, Hall said.

"He was very outgoing, tough, adventurous and hard charging," he said.

About 20 members of Wasatch Backcountry Rescue and six dogs participated in Saturday's search. Three helicopters, two from local ski resorts and



DANNY CHAN/LA/The Salt Lake Tribune

Terri Quint, wife of avalanche victim Bruce Quint, thanks searchers Chad Jaques, left, and Roy Mullen and search dog Deuce on Sunday. Her husband has not been found.

one from the Utah Highway Patrol, ferried the men and dogs to the avalanche area.

Terri Quint, Bruce's wife of 12 years, managed a smile and held back tears as she patted search dogs and thanked rescuers returning around 4 p.m. from the avalanche site. Her husband's probable death had not sunk in.

"I'm still numb," she said. "This isn't real. I want to say 'OK, Bruce, time to come down.'"

The Quints were close friends of Denis' and considered him a family member.

Born in Cuba, Denis moved to

Florida with his parents at a young age, Terri Quint said. She knows because she was Denis' English teacher at Coral Gables High School in Miami.

"He was a terrific guy," she said. "He was like a son to my husband."

Terri Quint lost track of Denis in 1992 after moving with Bruce to Salt Lake County, where the couple were married.

In a twist of fate, the Quints were watching a football game between the Miami Dolphins and the Buffalo Bills last season at The Fiddler's Elbow and ran into Denis. He was living in Salt

- Avalanche accidents rarely occur within ski areas or above highways, because avalanche workers routinely control avalanche hazard on such slopes with explosives.
- 99.9 percent of avalanche accidents occur in the backcountry – the bowls, peaks, and slopes outside ski areas, where there is no avalanche control.
- Three quarters of victims die from asphyxiation – breathing their own carbon dioxide – and a quarter of victims die from trauma caused by hitting trees or rocks on the way down. Only 2 percent live long enough to die from hypothermia.
- Half of all completely buried avalanche victims die within the first 25 minutes; 95 percent are dead within the first two hours.
- Almost all avalanche accidents occur to recreationists who are very skilled at their sport. Despite this expertise, their avalanche skills usually lag far behind their sport skills.
- Nearly twice as many snowmobilers are killed in avalanches than any other group of recreationist. Snowmobiles can not only go any place a skier can go, but they can cover 100 times the amount of terrain in a day as a skier, so if any instabilities exist, snowmobilers are likely to find them.
- Over 90 percent of avalanche fatalities in Utah did not call the avalanche advisory before heading into the backcountry.

Lake City and attending the University of Utah, where he was working on his Ph.D. in vascular medicine.

"I said, 'Oh my goodness, you were one of my students,' and we just hugged," Terri Quint remembers.

From then on, Bruce Quint and Denis, who both loved the outdoors, began spending a lot of time together.

"They were both big talkers, readers and thinkers," Terri Quint said.

Bruce had a Ph.D. in psychology and would have turned 60 in January.

"Bruce wanted to leave a legacy. Everybody who knew him said he would

have wanted to go this way instead of in a nursing home. This was a little too soon," she said holding back tears.

Denis had no family in Utah, Terri Quint said. His mother lives in Florida.

Denis' girlfriend, Schiffern, is devastated, Terri Quint said.

Denis was only six months from receiving his Ph.D. and was planning to move into a new house next week, Terri Quint said. He was scheduled to become a U.S. citizen on Wednesday.

Rescues crews will resume their search for Quint today, Rivera said.

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A search and rescue crew looking for **avalanche** victims is dropped off by helicopter near the command center in Big Cottonwood Canyon on Sunday. Below, Alison Schiffern, right, the girlfriend of **avalanche** victim Melvin Denis, is consoled after learning that his body was found.



PHOTOS BY DANNY CHAN LA/*The Salt Lake Tribune*



A search and rescue crew looking for **avalanche** victims is dropped off by helicopter near the command center in Big Cottonwood Canyon on Sunday. Below, Alison Schiffern, right, the girlfriend of **avalanche** victim Melvin Denis, is consoled after learning that his body was found.

Avalanche victims

