

# 3 avalanche survivors vow to return to slopes

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**By Associated Press**

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Even as they recovered from grisly injuries Saturday morning, the three men who survived an avalanche near Kessler Peak in Big Cottonwood Canyon on Friday vowed to return to their backcountry playground.

It's proof that winter thrill-seekers will risk nearly everything to tell nervy tales of outdoor machismo. Though next time, Bruce Meisenheimer — one of the trio — said he would "assess things a little more closely."

"I'm feeling pretty beat up," Meisenheimer said less than 24 hours after he and two friends were buried waist-deep in the deluge of snow.

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It's an understatement for the Salt Lake City man with a bone-deep cut that begins at his hairline and runs right between his eyes. Meisenheimer also has a watermelon-size bruise on his neck, a big knot between his shoulder blades, stitches in his ear, a dislocated shoulder and a bad knee.

His friend, Graham Stork, a veteran outdoorsman, suffered a possible torn knee ligament and is using crutches to get around. The third member of the group, Rick Hoffman, is hospitalized at LDS Hospital with a punctured lung and five broken ribs. He's expected to be discharged over the weekend, Stork said.

The group's ordeal began Friday afternoon as they were traveling from Kessler Peak to nearby Argenta Peak, one canyon over. The men had finished two ski runs down Kessler Peak and had not noticed any cracks or instability in the snow before the avalanche.

"We just heard a 'whomp' and felt the snow dropping and moving," Meisenheimer said. "I tried to grab a little tree right in front of me, and I just couldn't do it."

The force of the avalanche pushed the men through some trees for about 40 yards. Meisenheimer retrieved a shovel from his backpack and in about 10 minutes had dug his legs out of the avalanche. Hoffman and Stork were yelling for help about 50 yards away but were able to dig themselves out.

At 9,500 feet, the men regrouped and Meisenheimer called 911 for help. He just had time to tell a dispatcher where he was before the phone cut out. The men scrounged around for anything that might help them and recovered some gear, including a pair of skis that Meisenheimer used to seek help.

After wandering the slopes for about 20 minutes, he found a cabin and alerted the family there to his friends' plight. Crews spent most of the evening retrieving the two hurt men from the mountain.

  
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"I was worried for them," Meisenheimer said. "I knew it would take a while for someone to get up there and I know it was cold."

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Northern Utah has been hit this week with several spring storms, topping the winter snowpack with several fresh feet of snow in the Wasatch Mountains. The Utah Avalanche Center issued a warning Friday as warmer temperatures were expected to increase the danger throughout the weekend.

Seven people were killed in Utah avalanches this winter — more than any other year since the state started keeping records in 1951.