

Avalanche swallows snowshoer

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DAILY HERALD

An **avalanche** at Aspen Grove appears to have claimed the life of a snowshoer.

A slide about 200 yards wide and perhaps 700 yards long broke away from the mountains in Provo Canyon above Sundance about 2 p.m. Saturday. Marshall Higgins and Jeff Frederick, both of Salt Lake City, were snowshoeing just below **Emerald Lake** when the **avalanche** hit.

"The **avalanche** broke about 10 feet in front of us," Frederick said in an interview late Saturday night. "It came at us and we rode it for a couple of hundred yards. I managed to stay on top and I grabbed a tree."

Minutes after the **avalanche** quieted, Frederick said he began searching for Higgins, hoping he too had been able to grab onto a tree to save his life.

"I lost track of him as soon as the avalanche broke away," he said of Higgins. "He was only 10 feet away."

After about 15 minutes of fruitless searching, Frederick called 911 from a cell phone.

Members of the Utah County Search and Rescue Team responded to Aspen Grove, above Sundance, and a medical helicopter was called to rescue Frederick but heavy snow and rain along with low-lying clouds made it impossible for the helicopter to land initially, said Sgt. Spencer Cannon of the Utah County Sheriff's Office.

Sheriff's deputies consulted

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with avalanche experts and determined conditions were too dangerous to send rescuers in on foot.

At about 4:30 p.m. there was a short clearing in the weather and the medical helicopter was able to land near Frederick, who had walked to an area about 1,000 feet below the slide, Cannon said. Frederick, who was not injured, was flown to safety to the Aspen Grove Trailhead.

Because of weather conditions, rescuers were never able to mount a search for Higgins, who is 33. Higgins has a wife and two daughters, ages 2 and 3.

Rescuers may not be able to search for Higgins this morning because snow, followed by

rain and then more snow, has made for prime avalanche conditions, Cannon said. Rescuers were expected to begin assessing at 8 a.m. whether further rescue efforts would be possible today.

Frederick said he had never snowshoed at Aspen Grove before Saturday, but Higgins knew the area well.

"He talked me into come up here," he said of Higgins. "It was going to be our annual hike."

Frederick, who appeared to be in shock as he spoke to the media, said he was sad rescuers had been unable to search for his friend, but did not want to put any of the rescuers at risk.

Three Utah County men, two from Orem and one from Pleasant Grove, were killed in an avalanche while snowboarding at Aspen Grove on Dec. 26, 2003. Dozens of searchers spent days

looking for the men. One body was found three days later; the other two were located in the spring.

An enormous avalanche at the Aspen Grove trailhead a year ago tore hundreds of pine trees apart, while cyclonic winds caused by the force of the avalanche threw debris up to a mile-and-a-half away. No one was injured in that avalanche.

Avalanche danger along the Wasatch Front was rated as considerable by the Utah Avalanche Center on New Year's Eve Day, "especially in the upper elevation terrain where you will find fresh drifts of wind-blown snow," said a statement on the Center's Web site. "The danger will be on the rise today and into Sunday. It is no time to be screwing around in the backcountry if you don't have the proper skills."