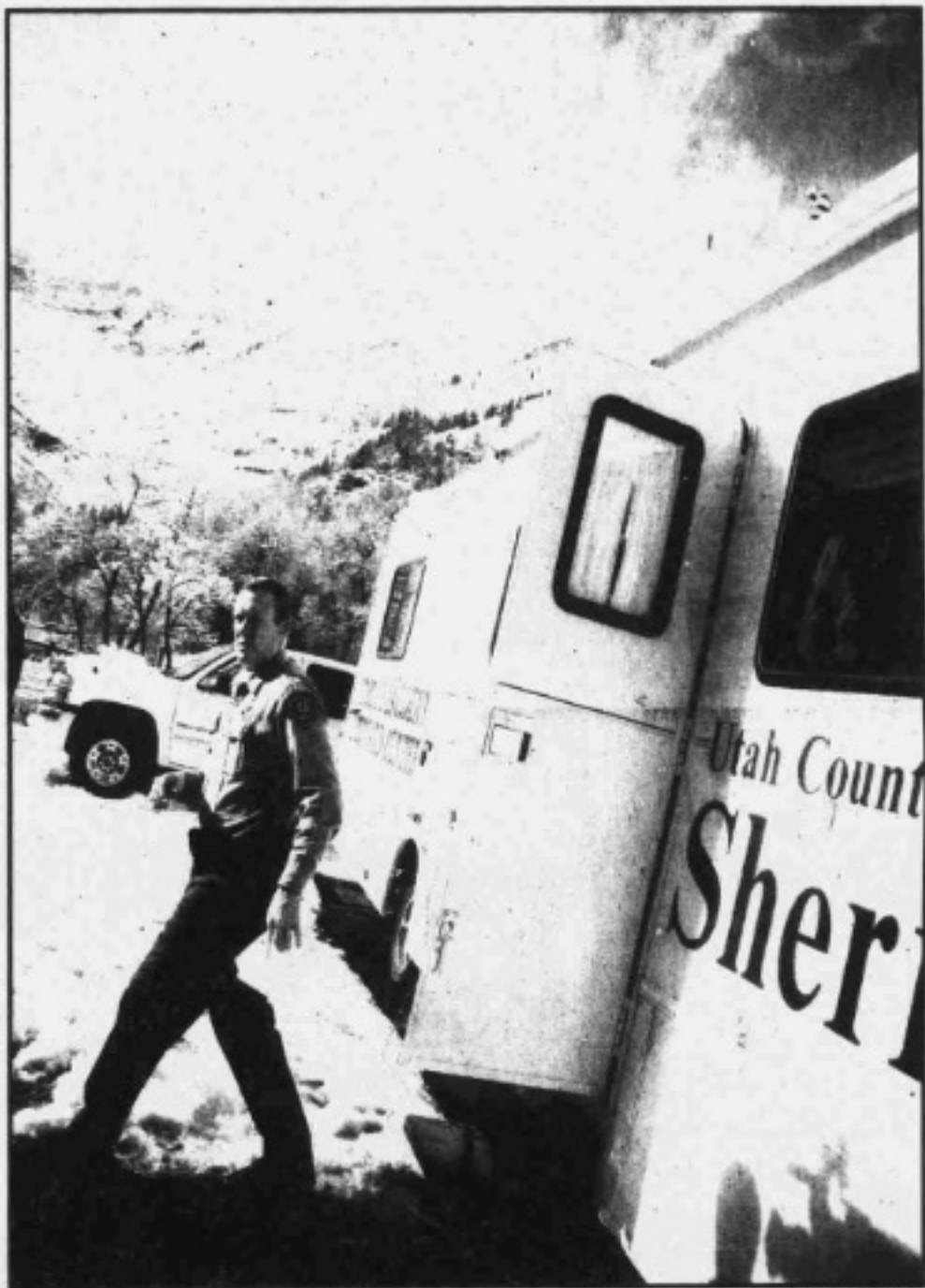


WILD WINTER



ROBB COSTELLO/Daily Herald

Sgt. Spencer Cannon leaves the Sheriff department's mobile rescue unit posted at Aspen Grove on Sunday after making the decision to not pursue further rescue activities because of dangerous conditions.

Forest Service warns of avalanches

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DAILY HERALD

With gusty winds and snowfall making the avalanche risk high in recent days, authorities are cautioning travelers and recreationists from venturing too far into Utah County's backcountry.

On Saturday a pair of snowshoers were caught in an avalanche in Provo Canyon above the Aspen Grove trailhead. One of the men is still missing

and presumed dead. Adverse weather conditions Saturday and Sunday, combined with the risk of additional avalanches, required searchers to indefinitely suspend their efforts to locate him.

About 600 square miles of the Uinta National Forest were closed to the public Tuesday as frequent avalanches continued to hit the Aspen Grove area, the Associated Press reported. Anyone who violates the closure could be fined up to \$5,000 and face up to six months

in jail.

Brett Kobernik, an avalanche forecaster with the U.S. Forest Service's Utah Avalanche Center, urges those without avalanche and route-finding skills to avoid high country areas.

"No backcountry traveler I know wants anything to do with toying around in upper elevation wind-loaded terrain," he said. "Partial clearing today will entice some people into

See AVALANCHE, D2

Avalanche

Continued from D1

steeper terrain, but wise people who want to be in the mountains for the long haul are giving the snowpack some time to stabilize."

According to Utah **Avalanche** Center data, there have been 19 **avalanches** across the Wasatch Front since Nov. 14, including eight in Provo Canyon. Of those eight, five were human caused and three were natural **avalanches**.

Kobernik said a combination of recent heavy snowfall in the

mountains mixed with strong winds forming deep wind drifts on steep terrain has heightened the risk of **avalanches**. Ninety percent of natural **avalanches**, he said, happen during or just after a storm.

Sgt. Spencer Cannon, a Utah County Sheriff's Office spokesman, said it isn't unusual to have an **avalanche** fatality this early in the winter season, given the right weather conditions. Including Marshall Higgins, 31, who is presumed killed in Saturday's **avalanche** below **Emerald Lake** near Aspen Grove, Cannon said there have been four **avalanche** deaths in

Utah County mountains in the past two years.

"Weather like this creates the right conditions for **avalanches**," he said, adding it also creates conditions people like to cross-country ski, snowshoe and ice climb in.

Kobernik said though ski resorts and the Utah Department of Transportation conduct **avalanche** control on groomed ski hills and canyons with highways, in backcountry areas adventurers are on their own. Personal preparation and education, he said, are essential to surviving any encounter with an **avalanche**.

He said no one should go into the backcountry without rescue gear, including an **avalanche** beacon, shovel and probe for each person. The beacon is an electronic device that transmits a signal to others' beacons to locate buried individuals in the snow. The probe helps pinpoint the signal to within a five- to 10-foot radius.

More importantly, Kobernik said recreationists should enroll in a basic **avalanche** awareness class, and check the Utah **Avalanche** Center's Web site — www.avalanche.org — for current conditions and **avalanche** advisories before fol-

lowing their wanderlust. From the main page, click Education, **avalanche** classes and Utah courses for a listing of training available locally. The center can also be contacted by phone at (801) 524-5304.

UDOT intermittently closed sections of Provo Canyon Tuesday between 10 a.m. and noon for **avalanche** control operations above U.S. Highway 189 between Frazier Park and Nunns Park. The department also prohibited ice climbing, fishing and other activities between Frazier Park and Bridal Veil Falls during the closure as a precaution.