

WSU professor involved in search for missing snowboarder

By Danielle Esler
correspondent | *The Signpost*

On Saturday, March 11, John Pincombe, 32, of Pleasant View, and Ryan Smedley, 34, of Clearfield, were backcountry snowboarding near **Snowbasin** Ski Resort. Shortly after their descent down Taylor's Canyon, in a section called "the alley," an **avalanche** occurred.

A 100-foot snowslide reportedly knocked Pincombe unconscious. After waking and searching for Smedley for nearly an hour, Pincombe descended down the canyon to seek help.

John Sohl, WSU physics professor, was part of the instant command team that searched for Smedley. The first team arrived at the helicopter landing zone near the **avalanche** between 6 p.m. and 6:30 p.m. Saturday, according to Sohl.

After three days of searching, search



Ryan Smedley

friends and family who were camped out at the top of 29th Street in Ogden.

"This is his backyard," said George Smedley, Ryan's brother. "He and about eight or nine of his friends snowboard this area constantly. He always wanted to try something new, but he was not reckless," he said in an interview with reporters.

Although Smedley was an experienced snowboarder, he did not have **avalanche** gear at the time of the accident, said Weber County Sheriff

and rescue teams located Smedley's body buried beneath five feet of snow Monday afternoon. News of the discovery numbered

Brad Slater in an interview with the *Standard-Examiner*.

The area Pincombe and Smedley were fording was out of **Snowbasin** boundaries and was not **avalanche**-controlled.

Pincombe and Smedley are experienced snowboarders, capable of navigating the steep, rugged and tree-filled terrain of Taylor's Canyon, said Weber County Sheriff's Capt. Klint Anderson in an interview with *Desert Morning News*, but "In a way, that works against you," because that experience can cause a backcountry snowboarder to become too confident.

According to Dave Damschen, a member of the Powder Mountain Ski Patrol, if snowboarders or skiers want to take that kind of risk, they need to take an **avalanche** probe, shovel and an **avalanche** beacon.

"I think a beacon would be the best thing that you could take if you were

going to go backcountry," said WSU student Zack Blair, a snowboarder and Smedley's friend. "You could be buried under 10 feet of snow and they could still find you."

An **avalanche** beacon works by sending out a beeping signal to other beacons. The beeps become more rapid as one beacon moves closer to the other.

Snowboarders often look for fresh powder, "But you have to take precautions if you are going down the first line," Blair said about the appeal to venture into backcountry areas.

Searchers also urge people to check the **avalanche** forecast before going into backcountry areas.

As for Smedley's friends and family who gathered in a vigil throughout the three-day rescue efforts, they are remembering the good times.

"He lived life to the fullest, and he's never been a reckless person, but he

was full of adventure and he loved life," said George Smedley when talking to the press.

Blair remembers Smedley's athletic abilities.

"He was a really good skateboarder and an even better snowboarder," said Blair. "He was a member of Basin Hardcore, which means he was on the mountain at least 100 days out of the year. He would do things that just amazed people."

Funeral services for Smedley were held March 17 at Lindquist's Layton Mortuary.

A memorial fund has been established in Smedley's name. Donations can be made at any Wells Fargo Bank and will go toward funeral expenses and a memorial in Smedley's name.

You can leave a message for reporter **Danielle Esler** by calling 626-7655.