

6 men buried but survive avalanches

They escape slides on Mount Olympus, in Big Cottonwood

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Search and rescue personnel head up the trail in a snow cat to rescue two skiers caught in an avalanche Friday in Big Cottonwood Canyon. Jason Olson, Deseret Morning News

By Deseret News, Wendy Leonard and Joseph M. Dougherty

BIG COTTONWOOD CANYON — Six men were buried but able to escape two separate avalanches Friday as Utah's backcountry mountains reacted to the large amounts of new snow that fell throughout the week.

One slide broke near Cardiff Fork on the south side of Big Cottonwood Canyon just before 4 p.m. Three cross-country skiers were hit by the slide, which they said came at them through the trees. Their equipment was tossed around, and their skis were detached from their feet, said Sgt. Mike Morgan from Salt Lake County Sheriff's Office.

He said Bruce Meisenheimer, 48, Draper, was able to find two skis and used them to ski down to the highway, where he called 911 from a cell phone. He alerted search and rescue workers to the whereabouts of the other two men, Rick Hoffman and Graham Stork, both in their 50s, of Salt Lake City.

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Rescue crews searched for the men and were able to find them when another skier, who came across the injured pair and waited with them, called 911.

Meisenheimer was taken by ambulance to LDS Hospital, where he was reported in serious condition with head injuries and a broken vertebra in his neck.

It took crews nearly three hours to reach Hoffman and Stork, and they were expected to come off the mountain just before midnight.

Stork had fractured his leg in the knee area and also suffered some chest injuries. He was in serious condition and was taken to a local hospital. Hoffman suffered chest injuries, but was reported in fair condition.

"They are in happy spirits to be found," Morgan said.

The second slide occurred on the west face of Mount Olympus at about the same time Friday afternoon. Officers received a call from one of three Salt Lake area men who were climbing the face and were unexpectedly buried but able to dig themselves out.

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"They were planning to camp out for the night and go for the summit in the morning," said Salt Lake County Sheriff's Lt. Teri Sommers. She said two of them were only half-buried and were able to help dig each other out. One of the men was identified as Jason Livingston; the other's name had not been released by press time.

The men located the other, Derek Doman, who had created an air pocket to surround himself as he waited while the others dug to reach him. He was under several feet of snow for nearly 45 minutes as the others used shovels they had carried with them to dig him out.

"They were all well-equipped to hike there and had apparently had avalanche training," Sommers said. "They were relatively prepared."

The three hiked back down the mountain along Thousand Oaks Trail, where emergency crews met them. None was injured and they refused offers of medical care.

Bruce Tremper, director of the Forest Service Utah Avalanche Center said there were several avalanches in the Ogden area Thursday, due to the new water weight on lightly covered slopes. Two of those avalanches were triggered by out-of-bounds skiers, he said.

"Most of the activity yesterday occurred because more dense snow was deposited on top of lighter snow from Wednesday," he said as part of Friday's mountain weather advisory.

Friday's level of avalanche danger was considerable, but in areas where snowpack was stable, it was considered moderate.


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A statement from the Utah Avalanche Center said rapid warming was expected for the weekend, boding an increase in the danger of wet avalanches for most of Utah's mountains. Tremper said he expected the danger scale to rise to high for the weekend.

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"People need to know that the mountains right now are very dangerous," Morgan said. He cautioned skiers to stay out of the backcountry for a few days to let the conditions at high

elevations settle.