

all over the country. The warnings are designed to reach potential visitors to the mountains in the winter which don't normally call our advisory, especially Boy Scout troops, hikers and other more casual visitors to the mountains. Thanks in part to the avalanche warnings broadcast by the UAFC, miraculously no one was killed during this very dangerous avalanche cycle.

But the first avalanche death of the season occurred on February 2nd, just two days after the snows finally stopped, and this time, it was an avalanche professional. The Solitude ski patrol was trying to open Honeycomb Canyon, a more remote part of the Solitude resort which they had not opened yet for the season. Earlier in the season there wasn't enough snow to open it and during the big January storm there was too much. Much of it had avalanched naturally during the storm and they were trying to trigger some of the remaining unslid sections with hand-thrown explosives.

As they reached the lower section of the ridge, throwing hand charges from the safety of the ridge above, Jeff Brewer and his partner threw a shot below them which triggered a huge avalanche 4-8 feet deep, 1200 feet wide and 1000 vertical feet. The hard-slab avalanche broke right up onto the flat part of the ridge where they were standing. Although he was standing very near the rocks, Jeff Brewer, a 20 year veteran patroller suddenly found himself barely on the wrong side of the fracture line. The slide took him down 800 vertical feet, through sparse trees, over a cliff and buried him vertically, head up, with his head 1 1/2 feet from the surface.

The other patrollers, Jeff's partner and two other nearby spotters, descended as quickly as they could, but they had to negotiate through cliffs and very steep slopes and despite these impediments, they dug him out within 15 minutes. He never responded to CPR and was disconnected from life support two weeks later in the hospital.

After any avalanche death in the Wasatch, backcountry recreationists seem to become more conservative. Combined with a stable snowpack and poor snow conditions most folks stayed out of trouble until the end of the month.

A smaller storm cycle in late February into early March created unstable surface snow conditions with 7 skier triggered avalanches, one boarder and 3 incidents in the Logan area mountains.

For the rest of March, with a stable deep snow pack steady weekly storms created short-lived instabilities within the new snow with 11 more unintentional incidents in the backcountry, only one person caught. We thought we had escaped the season with only one avalanche fatality, less than half our average. But on March 27th one backcountry skier proved that bad things can happen even on very stable days and even in very small avalanches if you're in the wrong place:

Local skier and climber, Werner Ruegner and his two partners were very nearly at the end of their tour, just a couple hundred vertical feet from the road. They were exiting Maybird Gulch in Little Cottonwood Canyon after skiing very stable, but shallow powder all day long. Not far from the Little Cottonwood Canyon road, and nearly as low of elevation which snow still

February and the Jeff Brewer Fatality

March

Werner Ruegner Fatality