

Sawtooth National Forest Avalanche Center
Castle Peak, White Cloud Mtns. Idaho
Fatality: 1 solo snowboarder
July 2, 2005

Saturday, July 2, 2005 a snowboarder (male, 31 years old) was killed while doing a solo, one day ascent & snowboard descent of 11,815 foot Castle Peak. Castle Peak is a prominent, remote mountain in the center of the White Cloud Mountains, 21 miles southeast of Stanley, Idaho and approximately 27 miles north of Ketchum, Idaho.

He was descending late in the afternoon and tracks show that he completed 3 or 4 turns below the summit and triggered a point release, wet slide that grew in size. The slide was triggered and ran in steep, rocky terrain and dropped over 1,000ft. The debris consisted of snow, dirt and many loose rocks that had been entrained in the slide, indicating a full depth wet release. Deep posthole tracks were observed climbing up sections of the face so he was aware of the wet, loose nature of the snowpack. The victim was not buried and appeared to have died of trauma and exposure. He was reported missing on Wednesday, when he did not show up for work after the holiday weekend. The body was located Thursday morning by a group of local friends and searchers and evacuated by Sawtooth Forest helicopter Thursday afternoon.

The slide was on the north face of the 11,815 foot peak and the victim was found at 10,600 feet. Although point release, wet slides are always a summer time concern, the high mountain snowpack has been unusually loose and wet at high elevations this summer. We have not seen the development of a typically denser spring and summer snowpack this year. This is due to a combination of a weak shallow snowpack throughout the entire winter, large amounts of snow at high elevations during May and very poor overnight freezes since early June.

Janet Kellam
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