

2/13/2014 – Idaho –Bald Mountain Sidecountry

Location:

Place Double Aught Chute, Bald Mountain Sidecountry
State Idaho
Date 2/13/2014
Time 1217
Summary 1 snowboarder partially buried and injured after striking tree

Number:

Caught 1
Fully Buried 0
Injured 1
Killed 0

Avalanche Details:

Type SS
Trigger AS
Subcode u
Size D2
Weak Layer Faceted Crystals
Aspect NW
Elevation 8160
Slope Angle 36
Character Crown line at roll-over
Crown Width Less than 100 feet
Crown Height 2 feet

Accident Summary:

A 50 y/o male was snowboarding alone in a sidecountry area (out-of-bounds, uncontrolled and unpatrolled) on Bald Mountain. He ducked a rope and passed at least one sign stating that he was leaving the ski area boundary. He was not carrying rescue gear (beacon, shovel, probe, or pack).

He triggered and was caught in the avalanche where the slope steepens at the top of Double Aught Chute. The avalanche carried him approximately 600 vertical feet. The ride was physically traumatic and he was wrapped around a small tree and partially buried. Fortunately, he was conscious, able to reach his cell phone, and able to describe his location to the 911 dispatch.

He was rescued by the Sun Valley Ski Patrol and transported by Life Flight helicopter to Boise.

According to the Sherriff's report, the following injuries occurred:

- Multiple lacerations and blunt trauma to face

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- Fractured C7 vertebra
- Broken R clavicle
- Broken Ribs
- Broken Pelvis
- Broken Femur

Terrain Summary:

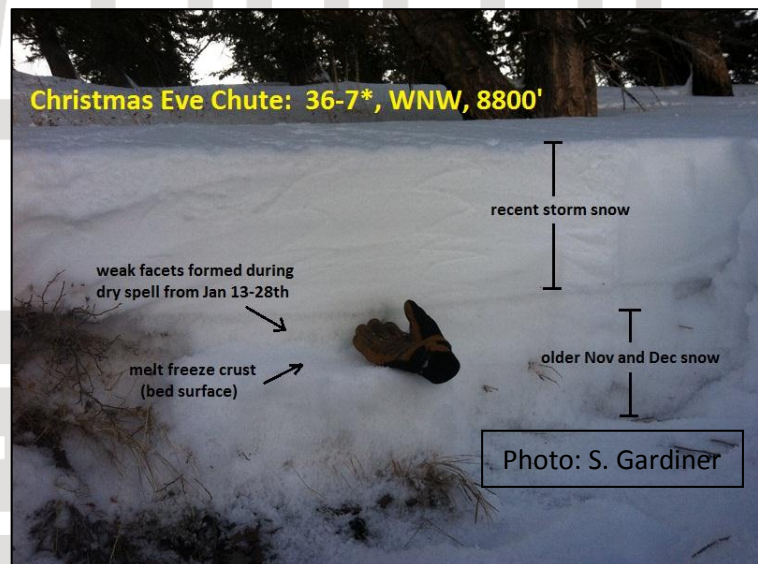
Double Aught Chute is a steep, treed, gully system on the NW side of Bald Mountain. It is typically accessed from the 'International' ski run at Sun Valley. This terrain is not part of the ski area; there is no patrol, avalanche control, or guaranteed rescue in the event of an accident. In other words, riders venturing into this area are in backcountry terrain and are "on their own". The slope angle in this terrain varies from 30 to 38 degrees - typical slope angles for avalanching under the right snowpack scenario.



The avalanche was triggered at the top of the gully where the slope steepens from 34 to 37 degrees (the photo looks uphill from the burial site).

Snowpack and Weather Summary:

December and January were very dry and somewhat cold in the Wood River Valley. The first large storm of the winter began on February 6 and deposited 15-20 inches of snow (1.5-2" SWE) on top of old, very weak faceted snow from November and December. Several skier triggered avalanches were reported in the Bald Mountain sidecountry at the end of this storm event.



On February 11, another strong

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storm (1.85" SWE) impacted the area, increasing the probability of both natural and human-triggered avalanches (snowpack photo taken 2 days prior to the accident).

Between February 8 and 16, a total of six skier-triggered avalanches and three natural avalanches were reported in the Bald Mountain sidecountry. The weak layer in question was composed of near surface faceted crystals (above a crust) that were buried and preserved around February 1.

Analysis:

This avalanche could have been anticipated (or avoided?), based on publically available information. The avalanche danger in the Wood River Valley was rated CONSIDERABLE on February 13. Text from that morning's avalanche advisory for the Wood River Valley follows:

"BOTTOMLINE: The avalanche danger is CONSIDERABLE. There was a skier triggered avalanche yesterday in the Baldy out-of-bounds, and several others earlier in the week. Human-triggered and remote-triggered avalanches are likely today; especially on shaded mid and upper elevation slopes.

PRIMARY CONCERN: At least 4 skier triggered avalanches have occurred in the Baldy out-of-bounds since last Sunday (see picture). Note that the slope is relatively low angle...now picture yourself being slowly, but not slowly enough, pushed through the trees at the bottom...not fun folks. This scenario is not going away. Similar avalanches are likely today and the danger will increase tomorrow as new snow further loads a very weak and poorly structured snowpack. Complex and dangerous conditions exist and conservative decision-making in and near avalanche terrain is essential today."

The victim was fortunate in several ways:

1. He did not die from trauma.
2. He was not completely buried.
3. He was not unconscious after multiple blows to the head and body.
4. He was able to reach and operate his cellular phone.
5. He had cellular service.
6. He was lucid and able to tell the 911 dispatch where to start the search.
7. The Sun Valley Ski Patrol had the personnel and ability to safely locate and extricate him.

The victim was unfortunate in the following:

1. He suffered several potentially life changing injuries.

Serious avalanche terrain exists in the sidecountry areas on Bald Mountain. If you are caught in an avalanche in this area you will likely suffer serious trauma (if not worse) from tree strikes. In addition, you cannot control who is above or below you; a slide started by people above may entrain your group and, conversely, if you start a slide it may entrain groups below.