

Avalanche Accident at Alpentel Ski Area, 1-12-2005

Accident Date: 1-12-2005

Location of incident— Alpentel Ski Area (near Snoqualmie Pass, Central WA Cascades); ski area had operated so far this season due to low snow cover

Number in party—2; 2 skiers caught; 1 partially buried (able to self extricate) and 1 totally buried. Totally buried victim found by beacon within ~10-15 minutes; victim located prone about 4 ft below the snow surface

Type of activity—ski

Elevation—4400 ft

Aspect—Northeast

Slope angle—40+ degrees

Preliminary Avalanche classification—SS-ASu-R2-D2

Other avalanche information: 12-inch soft slab, approximately 220 feet wide with ~400 ft vertical fall; slide witnessed by two other nearby skiers.

Summary Prepared by: Garth Ferber, Northwest Weather and Avalanche Center

Summary: A pair of back country skiers toured on skins from the base of the Alpentel ski area up a run known as Lower International midday on 12 January 2005. The ski area had not been in operation so far this season and therefore conditions were similar to back country conditions. The two apparently switched backed up the northeast facing slope on which the avalanche occurred to about 4400 feet and stopped where one of the skiers removed his skis in the early afternoon. Apparently while stomping out a platform or short trail on the 40 degree slope immediately below some cliffs he triggered a generally 1 foot deep by about 220 foot wide soft slab avalanche.

Both of the men were caught; the one without his skis on ended up partly buried and the other completely buried. The avalanche ran about 400 vertical feet. Apparently the avalanche was witnessed by 2 other nearby skiers. One of these skiers went to the base of the ski area for help. The partly buried man dug himself out and with the assistance of the other nearby skier located the victim using transceivers. The buried victim was apparently buried prone about 4 feet below the surface and dug out within about an estimated 10-15 minutes. Ski patrol assistance arrived at about the same time and CPR measures were administered for about an hour. The victim was then transported by helicopter to Seattle but never revived.

Weather conditions that likely contributed to the avalanche were strong west winds and new relatively warm dense snow that day, accumulating over colder lower density snow and buried hoar frost layers, in turn over a firm layer of snow from December which provided a bed surface for the avalanche. Skiers earlier that day noted signs of instability such as triggered settling of the snowpack and propagating cracks in the snow which was reported on a web site on the Internet.

This is a preliminary report subject to change.

A more complete report will be posted at www.nwac.us when available.

