

Skyline Ridge Avalanche Accident—
Near Stevens Pass, WA on 01/21/2002

Accident report prepared by Stevens Pass Professional Ski Patroller, Shane West

Summary—January 21, 2002 –At approximately 13:05 hrs a mixed group of five skiers and snowboarders (aged 20 and 21) were involved in an avalanche on Skyline Ridge, Stevens Pass, WA. All five were caught with four partial burials (one person had only one hand and his face exposed to the air) and one complete burial (6” under the surface- individually freed himself). Two persons were injured, one with lacerations to the chin and one with a shoulder dislocation. None of the group had transceivers or probes but there were 3 shovels among the group (used prior to build a jump in terrain near the incident).

The Numbers:

Slide Path

Location: Skier’s Right of Ramone Rock, Skyline Ridge, Stevens Pass

Elevation: approx. 4500 ft

Slope Angle: 42°

Aspect: South (190°)

Runout interspersed with 10’ high Evergreens

Avalanche Data

Sky: Obscured

Precip: S-1

Air Temp: -1°C

Winds: Light

Liquid Content: Dry Wind Slab with Moist Debris

Crown Width: 80 Ft

Crown Depth: 16”-4’

Length of Slide: 700-800 Ft

Deposition Depth: Avg 6 Ft

Deposition Length: approx 200’

Deposition Width: approx 60’-80’

*Spread over two zones in the runout

Bed Surface: Jan 13th suncrust (Meltfreeze size 1-2, pencil hardness)

*Evidence of natural activity in paths to the right and left of this path

The Trigger:

All five of the group were in the slide path at the moment it was triggered. They all went into the path as a group. The first one in had stopped in the bottom of the track to watch the others and saw the slide start before it hit him. It appears that the slide was initiated when the third (middle) person traversed in from the right and snowboarded over a thin spot in the right side of the start zone.

The Synopsis:

The group had varying experience toward avalanche safety prior to the incident. One individual had taken an informal beacon and awareness class from Stevens Ski Patrol through a concessionary ski school two years prior and hasn’t practiced his beacon skills “in a long while”. Another member of the group had aspirations to take an avalanche awareness class and buy his shovel/beacon/probe but hadn’t yet at the time of the incident. This person “had a bad feeling at the top of the path” but dropped in when he saw his friends start in.

For ancillary snow pack and avalanche information, see the Tunnel Creek Accident Report for the same day at www.nwac.noaa.gov.