

Mission Ridge Avalanche Accident

April 3, 2010

Date: 2010-04-03

Submitted by: T. Everett; Mission Ridge Ski Patrol

Place: Out of Bounds area called Outback; Mission Ridge Ski Area

Slope specifics: 5200 ft elevations, NE aspect

State: WA

Country: USA

Fatalities: 0

Summary: 2 snowboarders caught, partially buried, 1 injured

Accident Narrative: On Saturday, April 3, 2010 at about 9:35 am 3 young snowboarders were preparing to build a jump in a natural half-pipe feature in the Outback area. The trio had taken their boards off and were climbing the leeward slope (see Figure 1) from the bottom with the aid of their snowboards. Dalton (12), and Payton (13) had ascended about ten feet while Wyatt (13) was preparing to follow at the toe of the slope. When the slab released, Dalton was able to roll off onto the bed surface, but Payton was pushed over backward and had his face covered with about 6" of



Figure 1. Site of Avalanche Accident in natural half pipe near Mission Ridge Ski Area

snow. Wyatt was overcome at the toe of the slope and buried in the same position but under about 2 ft and with only his hand and a boot toe above the surface. Payton picked his head up and was able to wriggle his shoulders free as Dalton called 911 reporting an avalanche at Mission Ridge and then

dropped his phone to help Payton. Dalton took Payton's shovel and left to begin digging for Wyatt while Payton climbed to the top of the small slope that had released and called 911 with his own phone and communicated a better location and details of the party. When Wyatt was excavated his lips were reported to be blue and coughing up blood but breathing and conscious.

Patrol dispatch received a phone call from Rivercom (the local 911 emergency dispatch center) at 0940 reporting an avalanche and burial at Mission Ridge. No Further information was available. Patrol began assembling resources and contemplating possible locations when a second call from Rivercom at 0948 confirmed three boys, two buried in the Outback. Patrollers with shovels and probes were dispatched from the top of chair 4 and located the scene at 0957. At 1004 all three boys were examined by patrol and found to be in good condition. Access to the Outback was closed and the victims were transported to the first aid room. Five patrollers remained at the scene to look for two lost snowboards and Dalton's phone. All three items were located. Payton and Wyatt were treated for cold injury and Wyatt was later admitted to Central Washington Hospital ICU for treatment of pulmonary edema caused by bilateral pulmonary contusions. All three boys have made a full recovery.

Another pocket of wind slab was ski released by patrol about 20m skiers left of the scene after the victims had been transported and the scene secured. Crown and flank profiles revealed a 25m wide slab, 130cm thick tapering to 30cm on skiers left that slid approximately 15m down-slope. The slab consisted of wind transported snow with hardness of F - 4f sliding on a very thin layer of surface hoar observed on Mar 30th over a bed surface of 1f . The path is NE aspect, at 5200 ft with slope angles ranging from 41 on skiers right to 37 on skiers left above the trigger point.

The 3 days prior to the incident saw a small surface hoar event buried by 8 inches of snow with a SWE of 0.60 with 50mph winds out of the SW the night before the slide.

The luck of these three boys aside, their quick actions and use of the one piece of avalanche rescue gear in their possession undoubtedly prevented further injury to Wyatt and might have saved his life.

Newsmedia Report (courtesy of the [Wenatchee World](#))

Avalanche buries two teens over weekend

By [Dee Riggs](#)
World staff writer

Originally published April 5, 2010 at 10:22 a.m., updated April 5, 2010 at 10:42 a.m.

WENATCHEE — A 12-year-old Wenatchee-area boy was credited with rescuing his snowboarding friends Saturday after they were partially buried by a small avalanche at Mission Ridge Ski and Board Resort.

“Dalton was definitely the hero of the day.” Brad Whiting, director of Mission Ridge’s ski patrol, said of Dalton Anderson. “Dalton did things right.”

Dalton used a shovel to dig out Payton Weber, 13, who was partly buried, then raced to Wyatt Baird, 13. Wyatt’s left hand was the only part of him above the snow, Whiting said.

“I don’t know how many 12-year-old boys would have the courage to stay there, instead of running for help,” Whiting said. “In an avalanche, you can’t go for help, really; there’s not enough time.”

Whiting estimated that Wyatt was buried for seven minutes but never lost consciousness because of an air pocket by his face.

“He was extremely lucky,” Whiting said.

Ski officials were alerted to the crisis by the RiverCom dispatch center, which had received a call on a cell phone from Dalton.

Wyatt was removed from the ski area in a toboggan and was in satisfactory condition this morning at Central Washington Hospital. It was not known if he suffered injuries.

The other two boys snowboarded down the mountain, escorted by ski patrol members. Those two boys were not injured.

Whiting said the boys had a shovel with them because they planned to build a jump.

Wyatt is the son of Michael and Shaunna Baird of Wenatchee. Michael Baird, reached this morning at Central Washington Hospital, said Dalton’s parents are David and Katrina Anderson of Wenatchee. He did not know Payton Weber’s parents’ names.

Asked how he felt about Dalton’s efforts to save his son, Michael Baird said, “The way I feel, why he’s basically part of my family now. I just wish there was a way I could pay him back. He basically saved my son’s life.”

Michael Baird said that he heard that, when his son was pulled from the snow, “he was quite blue and he was coughing up a lot of blood from his lungs.”

He said his son was in the critical care unit until Sunday, then was moved to a pediatric unit. He said X-rays this morning showed that his son’s lungs are “quite good.”

Michael Baird said his son this morning felt so much better that he asked if he could go snowboarding this weekend.

“I looked at him and I wanted to scream at him, ‘Noooooo!’ ” Baird said. “I’d like to at least get some rest from this because, buddy, I’ve gotten no rest.”

The avalanche occurred inside the ski area boundary but was outside the groomed runs in an area called the Outback, which is off of Chair 4 on the north side of the ski area.

Whiting said the boys should not have all headed across the steep slope at the same time because that exposed them all to the same danger.

He said they should have crossed the slope, estimated at 30 to 45 degrees, one at a time.

He also suggested that skiers and boarders who use ungroomed areas go with more than one friend so more people are available to help in an emergency.

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Ancillary Accident Information:

The following avalanche forecast issued by the NWAC on Friday the 2nd indicates that the forecasted back country avalanche danger at the time of the incident was listed as considerable and was just beginning to slightly decline from a more general high danger the day prior to the accident.

East slopes WA Cascades - north of Stevens Pass, East slopes WA Cascades - between Stevens and Snoqualmie Pass, East slopes WA Cascades - between Snoqualmie and White Pass, East slopes WA Cascades - south of White Pass

Danger Trend	Friday		Saturday		Sunday	
	6am-Noon	Noon-6pm	6am-Noon	Noon-6pm	6am-Noon	Noon-6pm
	Strongly Increasing	Strongly Increasing	Slightly Increasing	Slightly Decreasing	Level	Slightly Decreasing
7000'	4	4	3	3	3	3
6000'	4	4	3	3	3	3
5000'	3	3	3	3	2	2
4000'	3	3	2	2	2	2
3000'	3	3	2	2	2	2

Notes: This represents a regional scale avalanche forecast for each elevation and time period shown. For complete information see the detailed avalanche forecast.

[Jump to Danger Scale Legend at bottom of forecast](#)

Forecast

Friday: Increasing high avalanche danger above 5 to 6000 feet and considerable below.

Saturday: Considerable avalanche danger above 4 to 5000 feet and moderate below and gradually decreasing.

Outlook Sunday: Considerable avalanche danger above 6000 feet and moderate below.

Snowpack Analysis

The second very strong storm of the week is upon us this Friday morning. A winter-like storm is moving across the Pacific Northwest Friday, already having deposited 3 to 6 inches of snow and bringing very strong crest level winds.

The previous strong storm late Sunday through Tuesday deposited 1 to 2 feet of snow along with strong winds. A gap of a few days between storms allowed for the old snow to mostly settle and stabilize. However, the new storm snow along with strong winds has rapidly caused a significant increase in avalanche danger.

Reports are already coming in Friday morning from control missions at Alpental at Snoqualmie Pass where soft slabs were easily ski triggered along with some natural slides as well near ridges. Most slides were about a foot deep involving the new storm snow, however some involved the earlier storm snow.

Surface hoar has been formed in many areas the past two nights and this layer may have been buried early Friday creating a new weak layer. Some sunshine and warming has also allowed a thin near surface crust to form on many east and southerly aspects and this may act as a sliding layer for avalanches, especially on loaded east facing slopes.

The current high avalanche danger is increasing Friday morning making backcountry travel in avalanche terrain not recommended at higher elevations.

Detailed Forecasts

Friday and Friday night

Very strong winds and moderate to heavy snow at low snow levels is expected through Friday with a frontal passage near midday. This should continue to increase the avalanche danger Friday with new unstable layers rapidly building, especially at higher elevations on lee slopes.

Strong and shifting winds later Friday with continued moderate to heavy snow showers through Friday night should cause a further increase in danger. Travel in avalanche terrain is not recommended Friday at higher elevations.

Saturday and Saturday night

Moderate snow showers Saturday morning with gradually decreasing winds and diminishing showers late Saturday. This should maintain unstable snow early Saturday with a gradual decreasing danger later Saturday as unstable snow begins to stabilize. Be thinking about any received sunshine that may quickly make new snow layers unstable, as well as recent cornice developments.

Outlook Sunday

Another frontal system is expected to stall along the coast Sunday then move into the area late Sunday and Sunday night. This should allow for unstable snow to slowly settle Sunday but increasing winds may maintain unstable snow at higher elevations, near ridges. Also, any sunshine received Sunday may quickly make wet snow avalanches possible on exposed slopes. Careful snowpack evaluation, cautious route finding and conservative decision-making will be essential.

Backcountry travelers should be aware that elevation and geographic distinctions are approximate and that a transition zone between dangers exists. Remember there are avalanche safe areas in the mountains during all levels of avalanche danger. Contact local authorities in your area of interest for further information.

Danger Scale Legend

5	= Extreme avalanche danger
4	= High avalanche danger
3	= Considerable avalanche danger
2	= Moderate avalanche danger
1	= Low avalanche danger

Click [here](#) for more complete information on the US avalanche danger scale