

## **Preliminary Avalanche Accident Report**

### ***Granite Mountain, WA, March 29, 2003***

Date: 29 March 2003

Place: Granite Mountain Near Snoqualmie Pass

State: WA

Activity: skier

Summary: 1 skier caught, partly buried, seriously injured

Elevation: ~3400 ft

Aspect: Southwest

Time of Incident: 1145 AM PST

*Avalanche Injures Skier On Granite Mountain Near Snoqualmie Pass.*

This report is based on information obtained from persons in the rescue group. The victim was skiing alone partway up the south side of Granite Mountain (top elevation 5629 ft), a few miles west of Snoqualmie Pass. On his way down, the victim either triggered a small point release slide or was caught by a wet loose slide from higher on the mountain. In either case the slide apparently entrained considerable wet snow as it spread out down the mountain. The starting zone for this avalanche path is approximately 4400 feet with the runout extending to approximately the 2500 ft level. It is estimated that the victim was caught at about the 3500 ft level and carried about 150-200 yards downslope in a gully, coming to a stop on the surface but partly buried in the debris. He was able to dig himself out, and then was assisted to the side of the gully by a hiker who happened on the scene. A cell phone was used to call for help. The victim was then transported by helicopter to Harborview Medical Center in Seattle and apparently suffered lung injuries and multiple broken bones including ribs and an arm.

The avalanche was certainly due to solar effects and heating of recent snowfall on this moderately steep south to southwest facing slope. During the previous several days Snoqualmie Pass had received several inches of water equivalent that should mostly have fallen as snow above 3 to 4000 feet. However, on the day of the incident, freezing levels had risen substantially in a warm southerly flow ahead of a deep offshore upper trough, and much of Washington was in the warm sector between the warm front to the north and a slowly moving offshore cold front. Avalanche forecasts issued both the previous day and the day of the incident called for generally increasing and considerable danger on sun exposed terrain during the day, with an increased potential for both natural and human triggered wet loose or wet slabs slides as well as cornice falls that could trigger such slides.

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