

FAIRFIELD, ID Camas County AVALANCHE FATALITY-JANUARY 2, 2004

WEATHER & SNOWPACK DATA

Preceding weather: The accident occurred during the clearing portion of an intense winter storm. Nearby SNOTEL sites (Soldier & Dollarhide) showed 2.8 & 2.3 inches of water received in 24 hours. Winds recorded on 9,000ft Bald Mtn. ski area (aprx. 20 miles to the northeast of the accident site) showed gusts up to 79mph SSE. Baldy winds initially blew from the South, shifted SSE then dramatically shifted to the West between 4 to 6PM 1/1/04 and decelerated by 8-9PM. They averaged 30-46mph from 8AM to 6PM 1/1/04 and gusted routinely from 40-60mph during that time. Fairfield winds could have been similar or even stronger as they are located in the foothills of the Smoky Mtns at the edge of the Camas Prairie and open to any south or west winds.

On Baldy, snowfall began 2100hrs 12-31-03. Precipitation rates were recorded & estimated at over 2"/hr for 4-5 hours during the intense part of the storm, mid day 1-1-04. Baldy precipitation totals were 2.15"H₂O for the storm. Fairfield most likely experienced more intense precipitation for longer duration.

This New Years storm fell onto approximately 1 & 1/2 to 2 feet of very light surface snow from two prior storms since December 24th.

An avalanche warning had been issued during the day of 1/1/2004

“UPDATED ADVISORY 1:30 PM THE FOREST SERVICE IS ISSUING AN AVALANCHE WARNING FOR THE MOUNTAINS OF CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN IDAHO. VERY HEAVY SNOWFALL AND STRONG WINDS HAVE CAUSED THE SNOWPACK TO BECOME UNSTABLE ON ALL ELEVATIONS AND ASPECTS. SMALL NATURAL AVALANCHES HAVE BEEN REPORTED AROUND KETCHUM AND MORE AVALANCHES ARE EXPECTED. RESIDENTS OF COMMUNITIES THAT LIVE IN OR NEAR AVALANCHE PATHS SHOULD TAKE PRECAUTIONARY MEASURES.”

AVALANCHE DATA

SS-N-3-O

Dimensions: width~375ft, vertical fall 535ft

Crown Face: average depth 2 to 2&1/2 ft deep, varied from 1 to 3 feet(30-90cm)deep

Depth of debris: Estimated 7-14 feet deep in & around the cabin

Alpha angle from toe of debris=18*

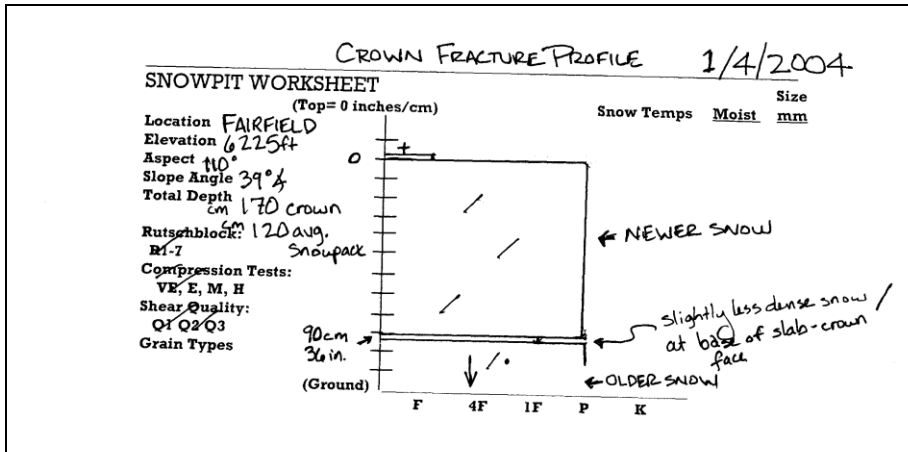
Angle to fracture line from cabin back wall=24*

Aspect: 110* (ESE)

Snowpack average depth in starting zone=170cm (5ft 7")

Snowpack average depth sheltered, mid slope=120 to 135 cm (4ft-4ft 6")

The avalanche itself consisted of windblown new snow and snow from the earlier two Christmas storms. The weak layer appeared to be light density snow on an older snow surface or earlier storm snow. No faceted snow or buried surface hoar were found in the failure plane. Of interest was the bed surface- firm to slightly firm at the crown face, then immediately downslope it became a 4 finger density. Yet no older snow was incorporated into the slide.



TERRAIN DATA

Crown line elevation: 6225ft, Cabin- 5690ft Toe of debris ~5650ft

Starting zone: slope angle 39*

Mid path slope angle measured 30* tapering to a lower angle, (estimated low 20's or less- unsure due to debris) by the cabin

Avalanche path: bowl shaped area along a continuous ridgeline above home sites

Windward side of slope and ridgetop= very shallow snowpack, grass sticking out. All of this snow had been blown onto the leeward side & starting zone.

Additional Notes:

Neighbors report never having seen the hillside with a slide that large, although they had observed smaller slides over the years along the ridgeline. Adjacent aspen trees mid slope exhibited signs of uphill scarring, perhaps from prior slides. This storm was unusual for the area as far as amount, rate of snowfall and strong winds. It was not unprecedented, and was estimated to be a "ten year" storm in the Ketchum area, probably more like a "twenty year storm" for the Fairfield area

GENERAL INFORMATION & NARRATIVE

Date: 1/1/2004

Time: ~ 1:30AM

Location: Soldier Mtn Road, approximately 1 mile before the Soldier Mtn Ski Area. 10 miles North of Fairfield, Idaho

Fatalities: 2- fully buried

Survivors: 5 - very partially buried or not buried but in the structure

January 1st, 2004 an intense winter storm occurred over the mountains of Central Idaho. The Busch-Landolt family was spending the holiday in their cabin outside of Fairfield Idaho. The cabin had been in the family for 26 years, and may be approximately that old. Local power went out sometime during the afternoon and the children and grandchildren made plans to camp out in front of the fireplace as they would do from time to time. The Grandparents had an adjacent bedroom on the ground floor. The power came back on around 8PM so fortunately the 3 adults and two children moved back upstairs in the loft. Lightening was reported by local residents, occurring sometime during the late afternoon-evening.

Estimated at 1:30 AM, an avalanche hit the back of the cabin. Avalanche debris came through the windows and doors & filled the back downstairs rooms nearly to the ceiling. The kitchen on the front side had 3 to 4 feet of snow. The loft area received 1 to several feet of snow but the family members there were unhurt.

The two men, recognizing what had happened, climbed out an upstairs window & tried to locate the grandparents in the downstairs bedroom, which was entirely filled with avalanche debris. After about an hour & ½ of digging, one of them went to the neighbor's to get help. The other located his mother's leg at some point. He said that upon noting her skin color & temperature that he knew it was a recovery & not a rescue. Not too long after that, Camas County Search & Rescue and volunteers were at the scene and had the couple dug out by daylight. They had been buried while sleeping in bed.

Meanwhile, Jenna, the daughter had been caring for her 5 year old & 1 year old children, keeping them warm & calm. They had moved from the loft into an adjacent building that had only been minimally hit & it had a wood stove. One dog was immediately located in the debris, unhurt. The second dog was found much later in the day; howling & whining from inside the fireplace chimney where he had been shoved by the debris.

**ATTACHED IS A MEDIA AND INFORMATION SHEET:
FOR PEOPLE THAT RESIDE IN AVALANCHE SLIDE AREAS**

This was circulated as the result of the Fairfield fatality and several Ketchum homes being hit by smaller avalanches in an avalanche zone area.

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