



AAC Publications

Small Slide, Long Ride — Inadequate Gear, Ignored Warning

New Hampshire, Mt. Washington, Tuckerman Ravine

On January 22, 2021, at 3:20 p.m., a skier was caught by an avalanche triggered by his party and carried from near the top of Left Gully almost to the floor of Tuckerman Ravine. An approximately six-inch slab of new and wind-deposited snow released from Skier 2's feet as Skier 1 made their first turn. Skier 1 was swept into and under the moving debris and lost their skis and poles. When the flow stopped, Skier 1 was buried face-down, fortunately with their head very near the surface and able to breathe, while the rest of their body was buried by two feet or more of debris.

Skier 2 located their friend, but without a shovel was unable to dig them out. Bystanders closer to the scene began to dig out Skier 1, and others, alerted by Skier 2, soon came to assist.

ANALYSIS

Just prior to the avalanche, a snow ranger suggested to the two skiers, who did not have beacons, shovels, or probes, that they ski the lower-angled slope between Right Gully and Lobster Claw or the lower section of Left Gully—if they skied anything at all. They later told snow rangers that the excitement of new snow drove them to the top of Left Gully, where the incident then unfolded. These two were very helpful to the community by honestly sharing their story with snow rangers.

There were no natural avalanches reported that day, which carried a Moderate danger rating. (The forecast did include possible human triggering of small wind slabs.) This pair was among many poorly equipped skiers or skiers traveling alone. Reading the forecast carefully, applying safe travel techniques, and carrying the proper equipment are fundamental to recreating in avalanche terrain. It is critical to acknowledge that the majority of avalanche incidents and fatalities occur on Moderate danger-rating days, where there may be isolated but large avalanches or widespread, smaller avalanches, such as the one on this day. Both can carry real consequences.

Of interest following this event were the readings from Skier 1's GPS watch: It recorded a total vertical drop during the avalanche of 850 feet and a maximum speed of 53 mph. (Source: Mount Washington Avalanche Center.)

Read the full report from the Mount Washington Avalanche Center.

Images

Article Details

Author	Mount Washington Avalanche Center
Publication	ANAM
Volume	12
Issue	74
Page	135
Copyright Date	2021
Article Type	Accident reports