# Triggered Avalanche Catches Two Parties

New Hampshire, Mt. Washington, Tuckerman Ravine

**On December 5, 2021, winds were light in Tuckerman Ravine and temperatures seasonably cold, with poor visibility near the top of the ravine. During the five days prior, one to three inches of new snow was recorded on Mt. Washington's summit each day, with varying wind from the west and northwest.**

Several parties were climbing or skiing in the ravine on December 5. In late morning, two skiers climbed to the top of Left Gully, evaluating the snowpack along the way using hand-shear tests. They found softer snow than expected but no obvious signs of instability. Near the top, where the gully opens up, they noted a shallow pillow of wind-drifted snow (maximum of six inches deep) to the right, and they moved up left to avoid the hazard. They transitioned to skis at the top with poor visibility. Both were prepared with avalanche beacons, shovels, and probes.

Below them, a solo skier reached his high point, approximately halfway up the gully, and began to transition for skiing, unaware of the two skiers above. His avalanche beacon had been turned on well before he entered avalanche terrain.

The two skiers above made a plan to ski the steeper entry on the right, appropriately skiing one at a time. When the first skier descended, a soft slab released, pulling the skier off his feet. He was swept down with the debris, and when he and debris reached the constricted portion of the gully, a larger, deeper avalanche was triggered, with a crown line that ran wall to wall, approximately 20 to 26 inches at the highest point. This skier was carried approximately 800 vertical feet by the avalanche, coming to a stop at the entrance of the gully. He was unhurt and on top of the snow.

The solo skier had not yet removed his crampons when he was caught by the same avalanche and carried approximately 450 vertical feet, encountering rocks along the way and arriving at a point further downhill than the first skier. He was on top of the snow with serious injuries requiring immediate medical attention.

The remaining skier descended on skis with continued poor visibility, looking for clues to help find potential victims. He quickly found his partner (the first skier) and the injured solo skier. A beacon search of the debris was conducted to rule out additional buried victims. The two uninjured skiers aided the solo skier until additional help arrived. The patient was packaged in a rescue litter, and a team consisting of USFS snow rangers, the Harvard Cabin caretaker, the two uninjured skiers, and several kind bystanders spent the next four hours carrying and dragging the patient litter to an ambulance waiting at the trailhead, arriving at approximately 5:30 p.m.

**ANALYSIS**

Anytime there is new snow and wind, you are likely to find slabs of drifted snow with the potential to avalanche when an additional load such as a skier or climber is added. This can and does occur before the Mount Washington Avalanche Center begins issuing a daily avalanche forecast with a hazard rating.

In early season, when terrain options for skiing are limited, certain features may concentrate skiers.

Left Gully had been a very popular destination over the previous few weeks, with snow coverage top to bottom. This gully is long, with no options to escape until the bottom opens up. With poor visibility, it may be impossible to see if anyone is above or below, adding an additional hazard. Early season excitement, limited terrain to ski, a shallow snowpack with rock-filled runouts, poor visibility, and recent wind-drifted snow are all factors that contributed to this unfortunate event.

It's worth remembering that winter is long with (hopefully) plenty of snow to ski. Slow down, think carefully about decisions you make, and consider that your actions may also impact others. (Source: Mount Washington Avalanche Center.)

**Read the complete avalanche center report.**

## Images

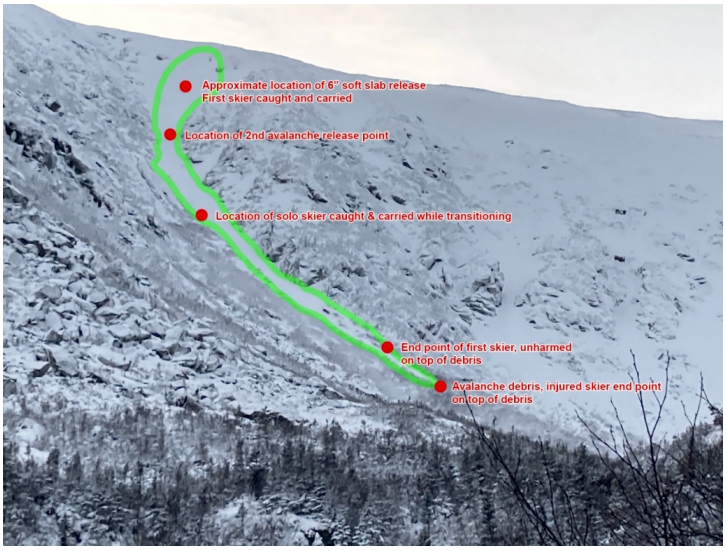


Photo-diagram of the avalanche in Left Gully.

## Article Details

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