

## **AVALANCHE, POOR POSITION**

### **Wyoming, Grand Teton National Park, Meadows of Garnet Canyon**

On April 18, Grand Teton National Park received a report of two overdue backcountry skiers who were in the park to ski the Grand Teton. The resulting search for the two men would eventually span seven days, encompass all of Garnet Canyon to include the North and South Forks, and would involve over 100 people. Though this large-scale search resulted in finding the two victims, it would ultimately show that both men died sometime Saturday night of April 16 while sleeping in their tent, victims of a very large avalanche.

### **Analysis**

A truly tragic event claimed the lives of these two men as they slept in what they may have perceived as a safe camping spot. Or did they think that this was not as safe as it looked? We can only speculate on what they had been thinking at the time they erected their camp for the evening, but a few indications merit discussion.

Both men had received basic avalanche training early in their mountaineering careers and were considered experienced backcountry skiers and mountaineers by family, friends and acquaintances. They had received condition reports from a multitude of people as well as avalanche reports from the Bridger Teton Avalanche Center and the Grand Teton National Park Permits Station. All of these reports painted a bleak picture of what these men would encounter as they made their ascent.

We know that on April 16 at about 12:00 p.m. the two men had received a permit at the Moose Permits Desk to camp in the Meadows of Garnet Canyon. Later, between 3:00 and 6:00 p.m., the two skied through a camp in an area below the Platforms where they had brief interactions and conversations with the four skiers who were camped there. Based on the conversations, it appeared to the four that the two skiers had an original plan to ski the Grand Teton, but the impression was that their plan had been downgraded, though they did indicate they were thinking of travelling a little higher than the Meadows to take a look around. Discussions were also focused on the current poor weather and avalanche conditions. Based on the weather conditions on Saturday, low cloud cover, it was likely that they could not see very high into the canyon and may not have been able to see how high the north facing slope extended above their camp. When addressing the fact that they had left their avalanche beacons on, but were not wearing them, we are left to wonder if they had some indication during the night that they were closer to an avalanche prone area than they originally thought. The spot in which they were found is in a treeless area at the bottom of a large alluvial fan prone to avalanche activity. Most of the large boulders in that area are typically surrounded on one side by spin drifts that afford a good wind break and allow some people to camp in a wind sheltered spot near the base of the boulders, as these men had appeared to have noticed. One of the drifts on a nearby boulder was about five feet deep. These drifts would act like a bucket in the event of an avalanche reaching them.

A party of skiers reported that they had been through the lower Meadows area on Friday and had not seen any notable avalanche debris. In an interview with a local skier, he reported that as he was skiing through the lower Meadows on Monday morning, he observed a very large amount of avalanche deposition near the base of the North Face of Nez Perce. These observations would put the avalanche having occurred between Friday afternoon and Sunday night. Statements from the four skiers camped below the Platforms indicate they had heard several large avalanches on Saturday night.

Though evidence of the avalanche was buried less than 30 inches of new snowfall, there was a faint crown observed in a large bowl on the north side of Nez Perce Peak, approximately 1,200 feet above the campsite. If this slide initiated during Saturday night, it would have spilled over a 200 hundred-foot cliff and triggered another slide directly above the camp. These avalanches most likely swept down in waves, one right after the other.

The tent in which the two were sleeping had every indication that the avalanche that buried it did not sweep in but rather fell directly onto it. It was crushed from above. Based on their positions, both men were instantly buried under three-plus meters of snow, entombed inside their tent, unable to move. Most likely the sheer weight of the snow squeezed the breath from them and certainly did not allow them to take a breath in. They most likely blacked out quickly prior to suffocation.

Our sympathy goes out to the family and friends of these two adventurers as the local skiing and mountaineering community is left with another solemn reminder of the unwavering power of these mountains. (Source: Ranger Chris Harder – Incident Commander)

## **FALL ON SNOW/ICE**

### **Wyoming, Grand Teton National Park, Teewinot**

On June 4 about 0830, Jesse Stover (39) slipped and fell about 2,000 feet on the East Face route of Teewinot. He was ascending the peak with two other partners with the intent of skiing the East Face. He was at the crux of the East Face, the Narrows, around 11,600 feet when he slipped and fell, tumbling and cartwheeling until he came to rest at the level of the Apex (9,600 feet). He sustained severe injuries to his lower extremities, along with generalized trauma to the rest of his body. Another climber witnessed the fall and called Grand Teton National Park (GRTE) dispatch, which notified the rescue coordinator. GRTE SAR rangers were summoned along with Teton County Search and Rescue (TCSAR) volunteers. With two rangers on scene, and with the assistance of the TCSAR helicopter, J. Stover was short-hauled from the accident scene around 1145 to the Rescue Cache at Lupine Meadows and then transported to the hospital via GRTE ambulance.

### **Analysis**

At 0400 J. Stover and partners (A. Japel and D. Stal) left the Lupine Meadows parking area to ascend and ski descend the East Face route