Although he was not wearing a helmet, I don't think it would have helped him. One final note, the climbing community came together in an extremely helpful and compassionate way to help a fellow climber. (Source: Matthew Lombardi and a posting by James Curry)

AVALANCHE, WEATHER

Wyoming, Cody, South Fork, Main Vein

To begin, Keith (Spencer, 45) and I drove up to Cody on Thursday, New Year's Day. Having recently soloed Cho Oyu, the world's sixth highest peak, Keith was practically voluble. He talked more in that seven-hour drive than I'd heard him say in the last decade. He was proud and pleased with his approach and performance on Cho Oyu. He'd made close friends on the climb and they were already planning an expedition to Lhotse in two years time. We spent the night in Kenny Gasch's Spike Camp in downtown Cody, rose at five, were scouting falls in the South Fork by seven. After glassing a half dozen falls on both north and south slopes, we decided on the Main Vein, a WI-IV, five-pitch route on the north side near the end of the valley. It was snowing and blustery, usual Wyoming winter conditions. We could see the top headwall double-pitch (220 feet), but little above that because of the inclement weather. We chose this route for several reasons: 1) it looked fat and thus safe; 2) the first pitch, which rarely forms, was in; 3) Keith had never climbed this route before, this would be my fourth ascent; 4) the grade was moderate. I led the ice pitches, Keith led the snow pitches. Part way up the second ice pitch we were hit by a spindrift avalanche and both blasted with snow dust. This is common in the South Fork.

As far as I know, no one has ever died or even been hurt from an avalanche in the South Fork. It is a dry region and avalanches were not previously considered a threat. At the base of the third ice pitch, we found avalanche debris, which surprised us. I suggested that this was a good sign, because it meant that anything loose above us had now slid. Keith didn't respond, but this was typical Keith. Focused on the climbing, he probably hadn't spoken five sentences that day. At the base of the headwall—the fourth and fifth pitches—although it was still snowing and blowing, the icefall and the rock walls around us were clear of snow and there was no evidence of a fresh avalanche, which we took as a good sign. I set off on the fourth pitch at 1:00 p.m., climbed 115 feet and put in a belay, deeply placing two long screws and stomping out a small platform for my feet. I placed the belay in a tiny alcove of ice, below a vertical bulge, so that Keith might be protected from any falling ice when I led the last pitch. Keith seconded methodically, as was Keith's way. He was in high spirits. Cresting the last vertical bulge, he was 15 feet below me, when he shouted, "Avalanche," in a nonchalant voice. I'm sure he expected it to simply be another slough. A millisecond

later, a horrific roar began. It was such a hideous, unimaginable thunder that I can only compare it to placing your head against a railroad track as a freight train blasts by. I instinctively squeezed flat against the ice. The bombardment went on and on and I fully expected to be torn from the ice. I was screaming from terror. I cannot say how long the avalanche lasted—30 seconds, a minute, two minutes. When it finally ended, I was still there and Keith was gone.

The power of the avalanche had pulled the entire icy rope through the belay device. Keith had fallen 200 feet. I found him hanging at the end of the rope. He was not breathing and had no pulse and it was clear his neck had been broken. The next day Keith's body was recovered and a search and rescue plane flew by to take photographs of the Main Vein drainage. The avalanche had started when a cornice at the crest of the mountain, 1,500 feet above Keith and I, broke. The crown face of the avalanche was 5-10 feet deep and extended a quarter mile along the mountaintop. Thousands of tons of snow funneled through a 30-wide passage. There is no reason this massive avalanche slid at this moment. It could have slid that night, or two days earlier or two days later. Keith and I had no knowledge of this cornice, but I later learned that high winds and very cold temperatures had created a dramatically unstable snowpack. I don't know why the ice screws held. There is no reason I am alive and Keith is dead. Keith was a man of extraordinary honor, humility and discipline. I will miss him terribly, as will we all. (Source: Mark Jenkins)

FALL ON SNOW – NEAR MISS

Wyoming, Grand Teton National Park, Mount Moran, Skillet Glacier

On June 2nd, a woman (20+) was ascending the Skillet Glacier with her male friend with intentions of skiing the Skillet Col. Both were wearing backpacks with skis on their packs, no helmets, unknown if they had crampons and axes, but I'm guessing they did. Near the top of the Skillet the woman lost her footing or fell backwards. She tumbled 1,200 feet down the Skillet, a fall that is commonly referred to as "Tomahawking." There were two other skiers at the top that were waiting for her and her friend to top out before they began their decent. They were already in their skis as they saw her fall. One of the two skied down to her right away to assess her injuries. She was beat up but able to ski out on her own and didn't report the incident. Occasionally we hear about some spectacular near-miss incident days later and never hear anything more. This information was relayed to me in rumor format, so I don't know any more than that. (Source: Chris Harder, GTNP Ranger)

(Editor's Note: Spectacular slides down the Skillet Glacier used to be an annual event, especially popular among young people working summer jobs at the various