

Hatch Peak Avalanche Fatality

Date: 19 March 2011

Place: Hatch Peak (Hatcher Pass area, Talkeetna Mountains)

State: Alaska

Fatalities: 1

Summary: 2 skiers caught, 1 partially buried and 1 fully buried and killed.

Avalanche: HS-ASu- R2-D2.5-O

ACCIDENT SUMMARY

Two experienced backcountry skiers approached the "Sunnyside" run, on the ESE face of Hatch Peak near 5:00pm on March 19th, 2011. There were approximately 6 tracks on the slope from earlier that day. Skier 1 skied down first and staged midway down the slope in order to spot skier 2. After skier 2 made a few turns into the run he felt the slide initiate. By using swimming motions he was able to self-rescue off the moving debris onto the side. Once out of the debris, skier 2 realized he had injured his leg. He did not see skier 1 on, or near, the slide path or on the debris. His lower leg injury did not allow him to begin companion rescue. He initiated a rescue using an emergency locator beacon. Skier 1 was swept down the gully and buried 14 feet deep.

RESCUE SUMMARY

Skiers from another party arrived on the scene first and began assisting the injured skier 2 and then performed an initial rescue effort for buried skier 1. They found the beacon signal at the vicinity of the toe of the debris and started digging a hole to excavate the subject. Due to the depth of the burial and the diminishing daylight they could not extricate the buried person. The initial rescuers were airlifted from the extrication site by a state trooper helicopter at 1951. The injured skier was hoisted out by 212th Rescue Squadron at 2041 and transported to the nearest hospital.

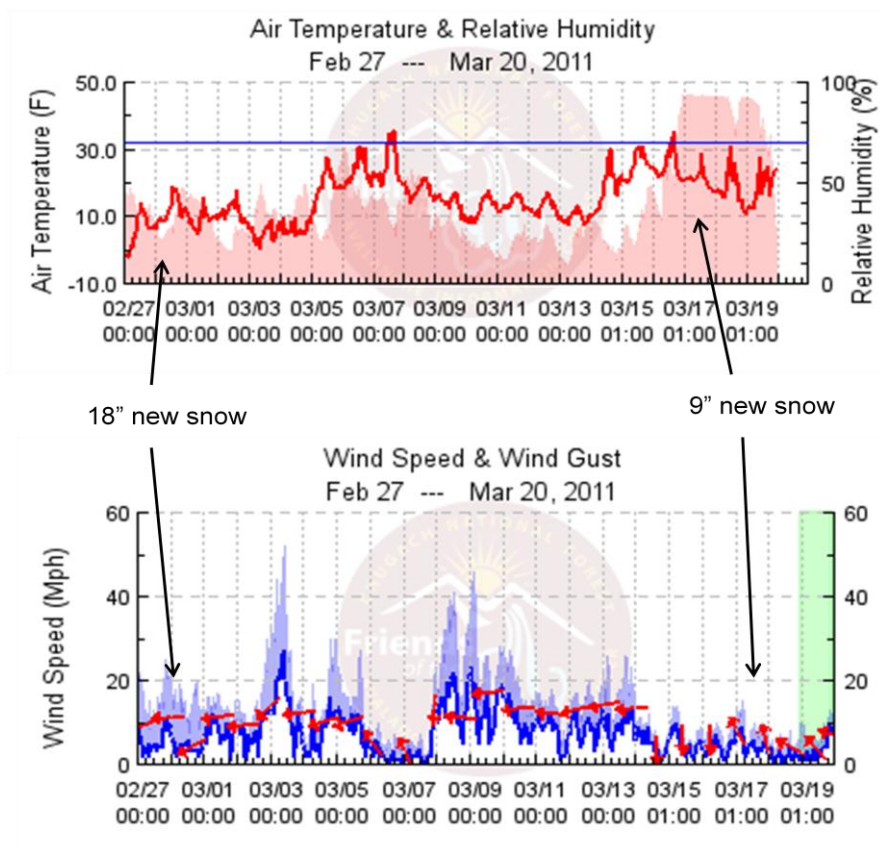
There were spontaneous rescuers at the nearest parking lot wanting to help with the initial rescue effort with snow machines, but state troopers on scene asked people to stand down due to avalanche hazard and diminishing daylight. Members of Alaska Mountain Rescue Group (AMRG), Nordic Ski Patrol and Alaska Search and Rescue Dogs (ASARD) were on standby to assist with the rescue, but were not deployed. One state trooper helicopter with one AMRG volunteer were the only organized rescuers that assisted on Saturday. A park ranger with state troopers made a plan to request resources for a search the next day.

On the following day, March 20th at 7:15am, an organized rescue by the AMRG, Anchorage Nordic Ski Patrol and ASARD staged at a large parking lot, just shy of Hatcher Pass Lodge. A snow safety helicopter over-flight showed some lingering hangfire that would run into the same gully as the initial slide, though with limited volume. With light winds, early-in-the-day temperatures, and 2 avalanche guards (1 up on a ridge, 1 on a lower gully rib), the decision was made to insert rescuers and work the debris. There was already a sizeable hole dug the previous evening by the backcountry skiers in the other party. The

smallest beacon reading at the bottom of the hole was reportedly 2-3 meters. ASARD members were able to use dogs at the bottom of the hole to assist in pinpointing the subject. Large, aluminum, grain-scoop style shovels were used to excavate the majority of the debris. Strategic shoveling (conveyor belt style) was used for excavation and took approximately 60 minutes to excavate the deceased subject, approximately 14 feet under the snow surface.

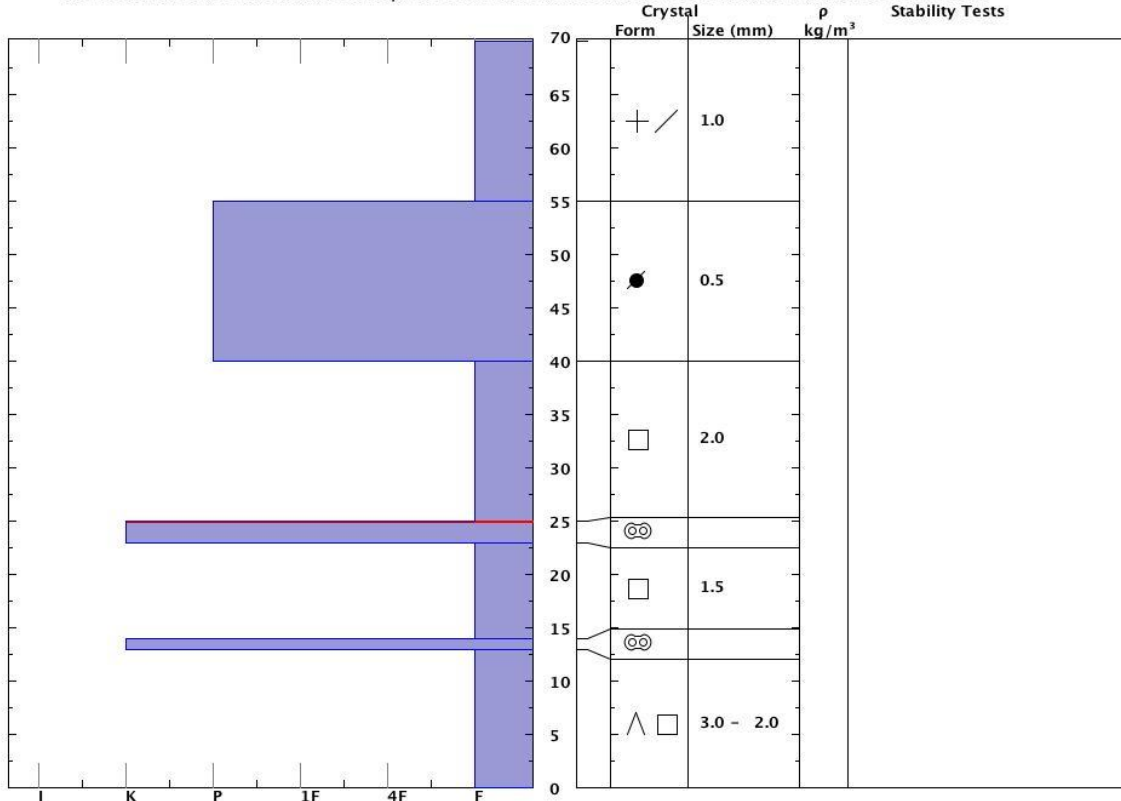
WEATHER

During the end of February, 18 inches of snow was recorded at the Independence mine SNOTEL site (2.5 miles NE and 1000' feet lower than the crown). Winds gusting over 40mph were observed at the Marmot weather station (2 miles NE at the same elevation) on March 3rd, 8th and 9th. After 16 days with no new snow, on March 17th, two days prior to the avalanche, 9 inches of snow fell with 0.7 inches of SWE. The day before and the day of the avalanche skies were mostly sunny. Temperatures were in the mid to high twenties and lows in the teens on both days with light variable winds. Temperature at 5:00pm, near the time of the avalanche, was 20F with winds light from the southwest.



There is limited data for the snowpack evolution in the Hatcher Pass region. However, in general by the middle of March average snowpack depths were 60 – 100cm. High winds during early March produced medium to large class 2 and 3 natural and human triggered avalanches. By March 19th the snowpack was reported to have been variable with 8-12 inches of low density snow over hard old wind slabs which overlaid faceted grains in many locations.

Snow Pit Profile	Observer: Eeva Latosuo	Stability on similar slopes:	Stability Test Notes:	Layer notes:
Hatch Peak,	Tue Mar 22 10:28:00 AKDT 2011	Air Temperature: C		25-40: Problematic Layer
Talkeetnas, AK	Co-ord: W N	Sky Cover: Clear		
Elevation (ft): 4500	Slope: 38	Precipitation: None		
Aspect: 120	Wind loading: previous	Wind: Calm		
Specifics: Avalanche Pit: crown;				
Notes: Crown profile of the fatal avalanche 03/19/2011. Investigated after the body recovery mission, 03/20/2011. No significant weather between slide & documentation. Crown profile documented at the corner of crown face and the skier's left flank.				



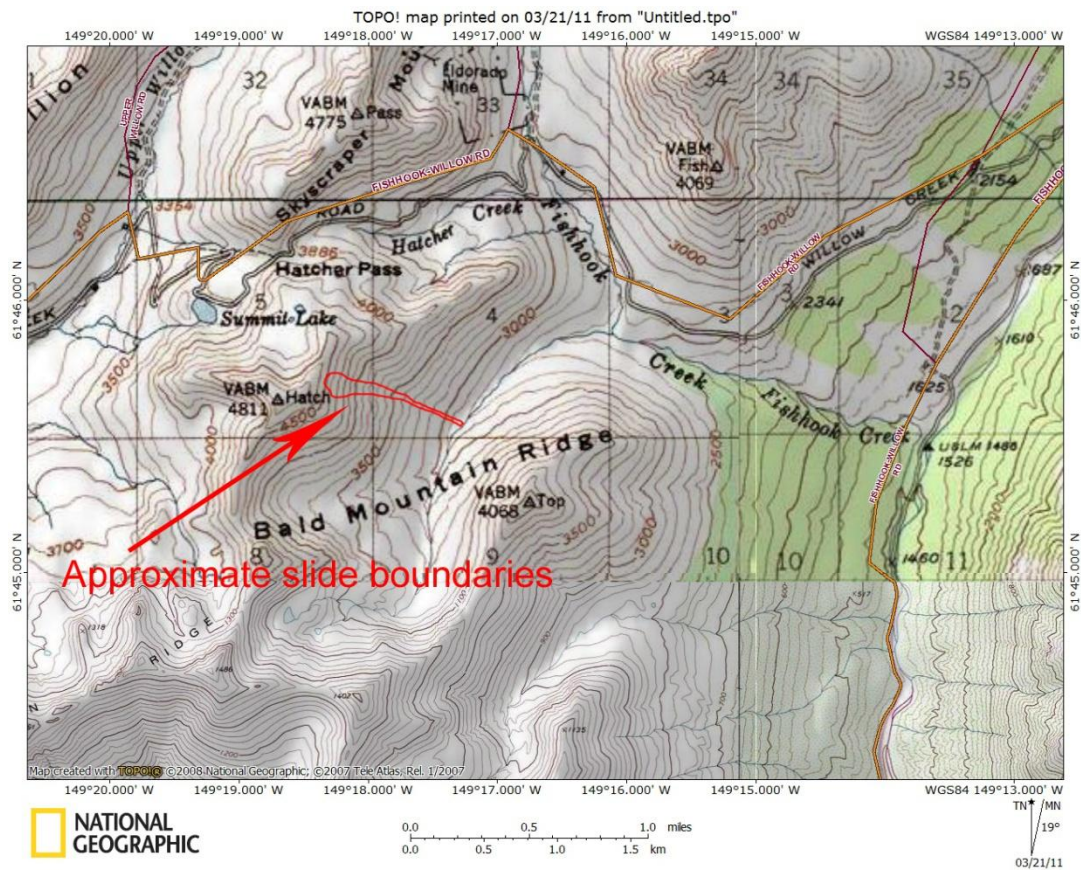
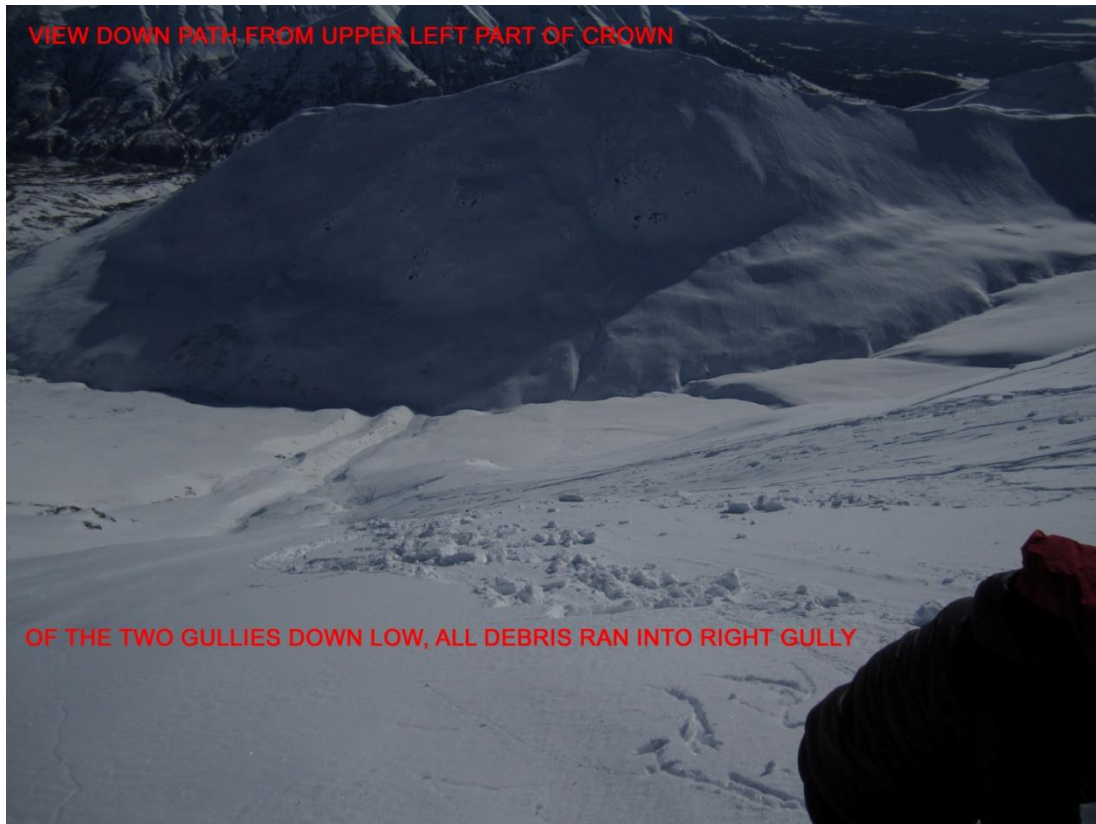


PHOTO LOOKING UP THE PATH. PHOTO TAKEN APPROX 200' ABOVE TOE AND BOTTOM OF GULLY



PICTURE OF UPPER CROWN JUST BELOW RIDGETOP





No avalanche advisory or danger ratings are produced in this region.

Report was written by Andy Dietrick (Alaska Mountain Rescue Group), Eeva Latosuo (Alaska Search and Rescue Dogs) and Wendy Wagner (Chugach National Forest Avalanche Information Center).

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