

05/10/05
East side Echol Col 12,400'
Size 3 Slab Avalanche
Inyo County Inyo National Forest CA
UTM 11S 0353940 4111313

Peter Leh
1003 Tremont St.
Port Townsend
Wa 98368
360 385 1612
Age 45
Male

Level 3 Avalanche education
AMGA Certified Ski mountaineering Guide
Professional ski guiding for 25 years.
Telemark Skis

My level of confidence in the snow pack stability came from several factors. The storm came in warm and turned gradually colder. The snow level was > 8000' the morning of 4/09. By 18:00 at 11,000' on the 4/09 temperatures and dropped to -15c snow continued s-1 with moderate south winds. Skies cleared over night. Storm total @ 11'000' were about 12 cm Winds had been South Southwest during storm and overnight clocked around to North Northwest and were strong enough to transport snow. These winds were removing snow from previously loaded slopes and could possibly be stabilizing wind exposed slopes. Day time temperatures had gone from -10c @ 8:30 to -6c by 10:40. As we skied towards the col the snow under my skis felt , right side up, and not strong over weak. No whumphing, collapse, or shooting cracks were noted by anyone in the group.

Communication with in the . group was encouraged and only Nancy expressed "How do you tell if it is safe? We were in flat terrain at the time. I dug many Mitt and pole pits on route, besides the top 3 cm which sheared very easy the tests revealed the new snow was well bonded to the older snow. The Pits dug were up to 80 cm deep. Being in a maritime snow pack and considering the four days time that had elapsed since the older snow fell, I was not too concerned with the stability of the older snow.

One loose snow size 1 avalanche was noted as well as some older crown lines on a 50 degree North Slope. I was still concerned and as we approached the steeper, deeper, North slopes above Echo Lake. I had the group spread out a minimum or 20' , chose a line that avoided the larger steeper slope and avoided switch backs as we continued up into the

moraine below Echo col.

I put Jacob last as he had be following behind me. I dug more pits with no new info revealed. The slope gradually became steeper as the aspect clocked around from North to Northeast.

I chose a higher line than we took on 4/27 with the Marines wanting to avoid being in the middle of the slope and having to boot straight up too long. As I approached a rock out cropping about 50' diadonal from below the col, the snow began to slide under my feet. I yelled avalanche. I could see little and the ride was smooth fast and quiet. I was head first on my right side and was not tossed or twisted about. As the slide slowed my head was going under. Swimming was not very easy with a heavy guide pack and four days food and gear. I pushed my left hand up as the snow stopped. I dug out my head shoulders and took of my pack. I looked up the hill to see the slide was large and had caught everyone. I could not see every one and yelled was every one accounted for. Jacob answered yes, but I asked again anyway. Paolo was there trying to dig out my legs and skis.

the time was 12:00. I took photos Paolo shot some video. Every one was safe and uninjured but we were still missing 12 ski poles which if we could not find would dictate us returning back to Lake Sabrina and our cars. We found all but one pole in the first 15 minutes and spent another tiring thirty plus digging for the last pole which we eventually abandoned.

The crown line width was 100m long. It's height varied from 80 cm on the north aspect to 30 cm on the east aspect. It reached near the crest at places linking rocks and thinner snow deposits. Recient and four day old snow made up the slab. The hardness of the slabe was from fist on the surface to four fingers deeper down. The maximum vertical fall was 130m on the more east aspect and the debrie bulldozed into the flat terrain of the moraine below,while the north aspect slid as little as 10m and stopped on the slope of about 30 degrees. The starting zone was 35 to 50 degrees. The bed surface on the east was a 3 cm k hard sun crust and on the North aspect is was thinner and not as hard. The weak layer was the snow that had come in cold and turned warm on 5/5 with a total storm accumulation of about 20 cm in the western sierra where I had been. Fair was weather had preceded that storm creating a well devoloped sun crust. There was no precipitation since 4/28 when another 20 cm had deposited.

Every one had transceivers probes or probe poles and there were five shovels in the group of 7.

Paolo Foggini
2410 Pacific Ave Apt. #10
San Francisco
Ca, 94115
415-622-6880
415-710-7522
Age 45
Male

Alpine Touring

Some Avalanche Awareness and Rescue Training

Following Peter circa about 25 feet. Felt slab break, went down on slab- felt like Tubing - first acceleration then gradual slow down. Body was face down, weight of pack pressing down, made "swimming" movements with arms. Came to a stand still, could not move body, managed to get left arm free, unhooked pack pushed upper body up- legs still trapped and twisted saw Peter,s head above snow- brief communication, dug out legs- fairly easy to realize bindings- looked up hill and realized that the entire group had been taken out- saw Graham + Jacob who said he counted 7 survivors. I had a probe only in my pack- I went to Peter as he was closest- began to dig him out by hand- had trouble reaching one leg. After Peter was free, looked up hill to see that the rest of the group was free. In Summary, the entire experience was terrifying. I wanted to cancel the trip at that moment and return to the parking lot. I was very scared for the rest of the trip and I spent a great deal of energy avoiding a full blown panic attack. Evenings in the sleeping bag were difficult and the event made sleep even more difficult. Never the less I am so impressed with the strength of our team and Peter's leadership. I don't know what the final outcome of this event will have on my relationship with the high Sierra. The skis could end up in the dumpster in the near future.

Graham Fogg
3640 Voleyn St
Carmichael, Ca 95608
530-752-6810
916-944-8109
Age 52
Male

Some Avalanche Awareness and Rescue Training Telemark Skis

We were traversing a steep section approaching Echo Col.

Peter in the front followed by Paolo, then me. Spacing was 20', but I think I was a bit farther back. I was concerned about the slope, given the steep pitch & 6" new snow from the previous night. I saw Peter frequently check the snow stability with his pole. I wondered how much snow would there need to be for this to be too dangerous. I heard a boom and my first thought was some one using dynamite. I then heard Peter yelling- don't remember what, but I knew he meant Avalanche. I saw the slope begin to fail at Peter and Paolo's position. I then glance up slope above me and saw the same dreadful thing coming my way. I pointed my skis downhill to try to out run it, but it quickly enveloped me. As the snow began to cover my head I tried to swim with my arms. I started to have difficulty breathing and thought I might die. I immediately thought of my wife and kids and fought like mad to make an air space. Then the slide stopped and I was able to punch one hand above the surface. I then cleared the snow away from my head, and waved my hand, and yelled "I'm OK!" My Body was entirely buried, and I knew the snow would start to set up. I began fighting like mad to dig myself out. I got out of my pack, then my skis. Eventually realizing my shovel from my pack, and headed down hill to help Paolo dig out Peter. Sometime before then, Jacob said everyone was accounted for. Then helped the rest of the group find poles and such. The entire experience was physically & emotionally exhausting. Everyone behaved with great attitude: No one Panicked. It was an honor to be with such a great group and guide.

Nancy Jarvis
2721 Willard Ave
Madison, WI 53704
608-273-8933
608-244-7007
Age ??
Female
Some Avalanche Awareness and Rescue Training
Telemark Skis

As we approached Echo Col I was skiing in the middle of the group, behind

Peter, Paolo, and Graham. Suddenly I heard someone call Avalanche and I saw snow cascading down the slope, sweeping Graham's skis out from under him. I immediately started backing up, but the avalanche quickly propagated back and knocked me head first down the slope. I only remember desperately trying to keep my head above the surface as I was being pushed down the hill, and after stopping when the snow began to pile on top of me. I had ended facing down the slope, both legs buried to my hip, and my right arm buried to the shoulder and my pack over my head, piled with snow so I felt I was in a little cave, I estimate that it was over in 6 seconds- not enough time to consider the possible ramifications. Now stopped I was relieved to be OK, but was flooded with dread about my comrades. It was so quiet. I started to claw at the snow with my free left hand, trying to extract my other arm. I must work fast- others were certainly buried. Then I heard a voice! Oh blessed voice! I waved my hand and called "help". Jacob Appeared and asked if I was ok, and if I had a shovel. Was glad to see him. He quickly opened my pack, but my shovel was near the bottom in two pieces and it took a while to find. I vow to carry it on the outside from now on. Shortly incredibly, the call came that 7 are all OK. I felt almost euphoric- Everyone was OK!! Now just to extract my arms and legs which Jacob did, and locate equipment. Almost everyone was missing one or both poles. By probing we found all but Jakob's one pole. I was very shaken and uncertain about continuing on, which would mean up and over the cole and down the other side which was beyond what I thought I could do at the moment. We talked as a group and decided the best thing to do was to press on. I was physically and emotionally drained and fell several times. I had to muster all my strength to get back up. The experience played over and over in my mind; talking about it made me feel faint. It is one thing to think something could happen, and another to know that it did. Very sobering. However, the experience certainly bonded us in a way and I am certain we will remember each other for the rest of our lives. thanks to everyone on the trip for coming to my aid many times this week, and for Peter's level headed and expert guidance. I will always be grateful to Mark, Tom and Peter for help comfort, diamox and a hot water bottle during my scary night of difficult breathing at Lamark. Adversity brings together- though there must be an easier way! Thanks to Graham for loaning me his over mitts and down jacket (mine were lost to the slide). Thanks to Jakob for digging me out and for being willing to be last in line, a position I did not relish. Thanks to Paolo for much understanding and emotional support. Comrades to trust and admire.

Tom McDonald
2209 Emeria Ave
Belmont, CA 94002
650-330-4397
650-591-1093
Age 52
Male
Little Avalanche training

Mark Lane
251 Park View Terrace #204
Oakland, CA 94610
510-246-8060
510-219-8036
Age 49
Male
AAire Level II
Telemark Skis

I was second to last in line as we were crossing a slope up to Echo Col. I heard someone near the front of the line yell, and then saw the slope give way as an avalanche. The separation crack propagated toward me. I saw the first several people being swept away. I watched the avalanche move toward me and tried to get out of the way by moving backwards, however too late! The avalanche swept me down slope: I thought what a tragedy- all of us caught in an avalanche. I thought I might die as well as the others in the group. I then started to fight and use my arms as wipers to try and clear an airway. When I stopped I saw blue sky and I could breathe. I knew then that I survived. I had to collect my thoughts, stay calm and free myself before I could help others. I was able to free myself, assess the situation, and then moved up slope to help Tom who was unable to free himself. I could not believe how far down slope Peter, Paolo and Graham had been carried.

Jakob Laggner
13172 Donner Pass Rd.
Truckee, CA 96160
206-383-7171
Age 22?

Male
Level 2 Canadian Avalanche Training
Telemark Skis

I was last in line, we were spaced roughly 20' apart, I had my head down when suddenly I heard Peter Shout "Avalanche!" I looked up and saw Peter close to the top of Echo Col. He was swept away and I saw how the avalanche propagated towards me and everyone in succession was swept away. I looked up and saw that the avalanche came to me but just barely. I prepared for the worst. I was swept down only 7 feet from my tracks and stayed on top of the snow. I looked around and did not see anyone. I took off my pack and started digging for my shovel which was way too deep in my pack. At a second glance I saw a couple mostly buried bodies and ran to them, forgetting about my shovel and hoping to use the shovels of the victims (packs were visible) I saw Mark had his air way clear, I then heard Nancy calling for help- She had her air way clear, I checked out one more body Tom he was OK as well. Mark dug himself out, I helped Nancy and Tom out. Meanwhile further down the slope Paolo got himself out and helped Peter and Graham out.