

# **Mt Rainier—Edith Creek Avalanche Fatality**

**December 18, 2007**

## ***Accident Summary***

**Time:** 12/18/2007

**Location:** Edith Creek Basin, Mt Rainier National Park, South-central Washington Cascades, WA

**Activity:** Snowshoe

**Avalanche specifics:** ~10 inch (25cm) slab, 45 deg, E aspect slope

**Slab classification:** SS-AIu-R3-D1.5-D2

**Caught:** 1

**Buried:** 1 completely buried

**Injured:** 0

**Killed:** 1

## ***Narrative from a member of the Search and Rescue Team***

Chris Morin  
Crystal Mtn Ski Patrol  
12/27/2007

On the morning of December 21<sup>st</sup> 2007 I left Crystal with Aaron Mainer and Lynn Baugher to assist in a search for a snowshoer who had been buried in an avalanche on December 18<sup>th</sup> at Paradise in Rainer National Park. Aaron and I were to use explosives to mitigate the avalanche hazard, while Lynn was working with an avalanche dog (Sherman) to search the area. Initially we had planned to use a helicopter to assist in our travel and control work, but due to complications we were unable to acquire a ship and had to drive which delayed our arrival to the ICP in Longmire until 11:30am. We quickly made our way to the Paradise parking lot where we met with park rangers Stefan and Monica. Stefan accompanied Aaron and I, while Monica stayed with Lynn who would stage at a safe location below the search area until control work was finished.

Aaron, Stefan, and I traveled along the Skyline trail until we reached the “Dance Floor”, at which point we worked our way along a ridge above an easterly facing field. We carried 24 kg of explosives with us which were divided into 12 shots ranging from 1-3kg. We began working the easterly aspects off the ridge whose runouts crossed the initial staging area for the search group. We released several slides with fractures 2-6 ft deep and 40-150 ft across running ~500 vertical feet (full length of slope). Many would step down from the new storm snow to a deeper instability. Although we were unable to observe the fracture line profiles it is assumed the larger results released on the December 3<sup>rd</sup> crust.

Moving along the ridge we approached the gully where the victim had been caught and buried. It consisted of more northerly and southerly aspects along its flanks. Few results were

observed in this area, with only one 40 foot wide, 1-3 feet deep pocket being released by a 3kg charge suspended off of a cornice. This was on a northerly aspect in the area the victim was caught. Other charges in the gully produced no results. Past the gully there was a large field 30-35 degrees steep and sparsely populated by short trees. Four shots in this area produced no results.

We were done with control work by 2pm and radioed Lynn that she could begin searching with Sherman. It had previously been decided that Lynn would be given a short time to search with Sherman before the rest of the search team would be let in. I skied down skier right of the field we had just finished and met up with Lynn at the bottom of the search area. I accompanied Lynn up the gully where the victim had been caught. We began zigzagging while working upslope towards the point last seen. . The debris from the initial slide was no longer visible and therefore we had to estimate its dimensions. The snowshoer had been caught by the avalanche and pushed over a waterfall 10 feet tall in the main choke of the gully.. The path rapidly flattened at the base of the waterfall to about 15 degrees creating a large terrain trap directly at the base of the waterfall.

Upon reaching the waterfall I began probing around its base but the snow was too deep for my probe to reach any layer that would signify the bottom of the debris. Sherman alerted near the waterfall but due to the unconsolidated snow it was deemed unsafe to let him pinpoint, and as that area would be fine probed regardless it was decided to let him move back down the slope. By this point the rest of the search team, about 25 people, had arrived and began a probeline near the base of the waterfall and began working uphill. I called for a small team with longer probes to work the area directly at the base of the waterfall. I then moved further down slope to help Lynn with Sherman. Sherman had a few soft responses further down the path and those areas were probed. Aaron Mainer began a small coarse probe line near the base of the projected debris in order to make sure the whole path was covered before the teams were forced to leave due to darkness. I joined this probe team. A metal detector and Recco were also employed in the search, but the Recco receiver appeared to be broken.

At 4:00 pm the probe line near the waterfall announced they had dug down to and found the victim. They had a probe strike early on, but due to the deep nature of burial (8 ft), it took a considerable amount of time to dig down to him. The victim was face down, head down slope when he was found. A toboggan was brought up and he was loaded and secured in. Aaron Mainer and I skied him out to just above the Paradise parking lot where he was left for the family to have a moment with him.



**Figure 1. Probe Line at waterfall where victim was found. Diggers in the center eventually uncovered the body.**



Figure 2. Another shot of the same waterfall



**Figure 3. The first portion of control route. Fracture depth ranges from 2-6 ft. Three separate shots were thrown in this area.**



**Figure 4. A close-up of the first result.**



**Figure 5. The main gully where the search took place. This is just to lookers right of the 2 previous pictures. Search teams were staged from near the area the picture was taken. Our control work on the low-angle field to lookers left is visible. There were no results on that field.**