

Accident Write-up from ACC Edmonton Website

<http://alpineclub-edm.org/accidents/index.asp>

CAC Accident Information

Date: 13/02/2001 Activity: Backcountry Skiing Mtn Range: Rocky Mountains
Location: Thunder Bowl Province:
Loc. Descr.: near Fernie

ACC Accident Write-up

On Tuesday, the very day the Canadian Avalanche Association warned that B.C.'s snowpack is unusually unstable, a killer avalanche hit the southeastern corner of the province. Thirteen skiers were on an organized ski trip just outside of Fernie, near the Alberta border, when a wall of snow came thundering down a narrow chute. Two were killed. Police say hikers in the backside area of the mountain range near the Fernie Alpine Ski Resort witnessed the avalanche hit around 2 p.m., but it took them three hours to hike to a phone and call for help. "We had 13 skiers who were trapped in the avalanche in a chute and at 5 p.m. emergency services and the police were notified of the avalanche. We dispatched a helicopter with an ambulance personnel and a professional ski patroller from the Fernie Alpine Resort into the area," said Sgt. Steve Robertson, of the Fernie RCMP. "At that time we were able to rescue two of the party and brought them out to the Fernie hospital. We lost daylight at that point and it wasn't safe to operate the helicopters after that." Two local guides and ski patroller stayed with the group overnight and then at first light helicopters went back into the area and removed survivors a couple at a time. The area is under a high avalanche danger alert and rescue crews admit it was hazardous operation. The survivors were taken to the Fernie hospital for observation. "They're extremely stressed and distraught. Most of the problems seem to be mental problems and also trying to recover from the cold after spending a night on the mountain," said John McAulay, the CEO of the Elk Valley Health Council. The final trip was for two Swedish females in their 20s who were killed in the avalanche. The RCMP says the deceased are 24-year-old M.A. and her 26-year-old sister A.A., both of Stockholm. According to police, the group consisted of 12 Swedes and one Dane. All were residing in Fernie for the winter." Fernie RCMP have determined the February 14 avalanche which killed two sisters from Sweden was caused by another group of skiers in an area above the 13 people involved in the accident. "Our investigation so far indicates that another party unknowingly unleashed the avalanche onto the other group," Robertson said Thursday. According to the sergeant, the group of skiers realized they had caused an avalanche, but had no idea it had smashed into another group of skiers below until they crossed paths with a third group of skiers who had discovered the victims about an hour earlier. "They (the discovery group) heard the victims and climbed higher on the mountain to get back to the ski hill and on their way came across the party who started it," Robertson explained. He declined further comment, except to say the investigation is continuing. The avalanche, which occurred in a popular back country area known as Liverwurst Chute located in the Thunder Meadows area of the Lizard mountain range near Fernie, left nine others stranded on the mountain overnight. Two survivors were airlifted to Fernie District Hospital that night, while the others were rescued the following morning, treated for hypothermia and released. The bodies of A.A. and M.A. were flown back to Sweden last week and survivors left for home Feb. 19. A memorial was held at Fernie Alpine Resort Wednesday. According to Robertson, no charges are being considered by police. "There's absolutely no evidence to suggest they knew the people were below them," he said. "So there's no intent and no motive so it's not considered a criminal act at all no matter how you look at it." Results of the coroner's inquiry will not be available until the beginning of summer." Nine European tourists were rescued from a mountain in southeastern British Columbia on Wednesday after they were trapped overnight by an avalanche that killed two people and injured two others. Two helicopters airlifted out the nine

NOTE: Write-ups originally copied from ACC website by Jeff Boyd during summer of 2007; extracted from CAA Accident database and converted into PDF format by Pascal Haegeli on May 19, 2009. Accident information (first section) comes from CAC avalanche accident database.

people, who had been on a ski trip in the wilderness when the deadly slide struck on Tuesday. They were taken to a local hospital to be treated for exposure, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police said. The bodies of the two people killed and two skiers who were more seriously injured were removed on Tuesday, but darkness had prevented rescue crews from airlifting the entire group from the area near Fernie Alpine Resort. "Under the circumstances the group fared well with a fire and calm weather overnight," the Mounties said. Three professional ski guides spent the night with the stranded party. The victims' names were not released, but police said the group included 12 Swedish nationals and one Danish citizen. They had been living this winter in Fernie, a Rocky Mountain resort community 120 miles (200 km) southwest of Calgary, Alberta. Avalanches are a constant winter danger in mountains near Fernie, and the Canadian Avalanche Association recently advised backcountry skiers in eastern British Columbia that the snowpack was less stable than normal.

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