

SEARCH AND RESCUE: 'IT'S THE WORST SEASON WE'VE HAD'

## Deadly avalanche season claims 3 more

**Bodies recovered from series of snow slides in Interior; one believed to be that of missing snowboarder**

**JUSTINE HUNTER**

WITH A REPORT FROM THE CANADIAN PRESS

JANUARY 8, 2008

### VICTORIA

-- Three bodies were recovered yesterday from three separate avalanches in B.C.'s Southern Interior, making this the deadliest start of Canada's avalanche season in at least a quarter of a century.

In the space of two hours on Sunday, a series of avalanches swept through a region favoured by backcountry snowmobilers around Grand Forks. Two snowmobile operators died.

Around the same time, an avalanche struck in a popular ski area open to the public at the Big White Ski Resort near Kelowna.

A body was recovered at that site yesterday afternoon, although RCMP would not confirm whether it was that of missing 21-year-old snowboarder Leigh Barnier, an Australian-born resort worker employed by a private firm that maintains condominiums at Big White.

**Print Edition - Section Front**



[Enlarge Image](#)

### More National Stories

- New rules to target overall emissions, Baird vows
- Schreiber asks MPs to review Mulroney's tax files

- Crown wants court to order new trial
- Female ski jumpers in uphill battle, Pound warns
- Grief hits families of soldiers killed in rollover
- Go to the National section



The body was found with the assistance of police dogs in the main debris field of the slide.

"This is unprecedented this early in the year," said Mary Clayton, spokeswoman for the Canadian Avalanche Centre. "It's the worst season we've had, in terms of fatalities." The centre started keeping detailed records more than 25 years ago and by those records, the worst is yet to come. "It usually peaks in March."

Sunday's deaths bring the number of avalanche fatalities so far this season, which begins in October, to 10.

Ms. Clayton blamed the avalanches on a warm spell in early December that brought rain to high elevations, followed by a cold snap that left a weak crust hidden under the fresh snow that followed.

"In almost every one of these accidents, it's the same pattern. And it's very difficult to predict - we put out a special warning for the region just before Christmas," she said.

The two snowmobile deaths resulted from snow slides that occurred around 12 p.m. on Sunday. In both cases, the victims' riding companions could only watch helplessly as their friends were swept away.

David Nanook Brousseau, 59, a contractor with his own business in Grand Forks, B.C., set out riding Sunday morning with five friends in the Wilderness Creek area north of his home town. The group broke up, with some stopping for lunch. Mr. Brousseau and a companion attempted to ride higher up a ridge.

"The friend noticed the snow was moving under him, and it was heading directly toward Mr. Brousseau," Corporal Kim Hall of the RCMP's Midway detachment said yesterday. The other rider was able to stay above the snow and he and his friends were able to dig out Mr. Brousseau, who was pronounced dead on arrival at the hospital in Grand Forks.

On a nearby mountain at roughly the same time, a similar, horrible scene played out.

Eric Hofman, 44, of Penticton, was snowmobiling with two friends when he was caught in an avalanche on Mount Arthurs, north of Midway.

"All three were very well versed in backcountry sledding," Cpl. Hall said yesterday.

"The one friend saw it coming and tried to signal the victim, but we don't think he even knew what was coming behind him."

Mr. Hofman's body was recovered yesterday after a search by RCMP dogs.

At Big White, hundreds of searchers were involved in the hunt for Mr. Barnier who was reported missing after an avalanche that occurred Sunday on the Parachute Bowl, an advanced-level ski run.

Two people, including a 12-year-old, were partly buried but escaped.

Although skiers at resorts like Big White routinely accept liability waivers when they purchase a ski ticket, Big White spokesman Michael Ballingall conceded yesterday that may not mean much if someone chooses to pursue legal action.

"You have waivers on the back of the ticket. But it was an in-bound area, we opened it, we told the public it was safe. Then nature took over," he said.

Yesterday, a 19-year-old man from Quebec was killed in an avalanche at Lake Louise in the Alberta Rockies. RCMP say they were advised by Parks Canada of the avalanche which occurred just before 3 p.m. on Mount St. Piran.

Two young men, both 19 years old, were out skiing when the young man from Quebec was buried by the snow; the other young man was able to cling to a tree and escaped injury. The uninjured man was able to dig out his companion.

© Copyright 2008 CTVglobemedia Publishing Inc. All Rights Reserved.

**CTVglobemedia**

globeandmail.com and The Globe and Mail are divisions of CTVglobemedia Publishing Inc., 444 Front St. W., Toronto, ON Canada M5V 2S9  
Phillip Crawley, Publisher