

Hells Canyon Avalanche

March 4th, 2015



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Backcounrty area outside of Snowbasin Ski Resort in the Wasatch Mountains near Salt Lake City, Utah

- Up until March 1st, Snowbasin records the lowest annual snowfall and warmest temperatures in 35 years.
- End of February/beginning of March yield 4-6 inches(10-15cm)
- March 3rd, 15 inches(38cm) of new snow
- Mitigation work with explosives and ski cuts in the ski area results in widespread class 2 and 3 avalanches.
- Much of the avalanche terrain at the resort is closed for the day.
- The next morning more mitigation work is done with similar results.

- At 9:19am the “No Name” area at the resort is opened to the public allowing access to the backcountry gates .
- Two snowboarding friends, one a former employee of the resort have been riding the open terrain.
- The two leave the resort boundary to access the “Hells Canyon” area which they limited knowledge of.
- Once in the area, they felt conditions were too dangerous and tried to traverse out but the lead friend is then caught the avalanche.
- The second friend tries to search for his friend only to find a glove.
- When he is unsuccessful he calls the Snowbasin Ski Patrol.



Entry point of victims
under the boundary rope
and just below the “Are
You Beeping” sign and the
brown Forest Service sign

- Meanwhile, while checking the boundary lines, a Snowbasin Ski Patroller hears the screams and in the distance can see the snow travelling down the mountain.
- He also notifies Ski Patrol Dispatch and a rescue team is formed.
- The Weber County Sherriff is notified.
- Life Flight (helicopter) is called to fly over to help access the scene.
- The backcountry access gates to the area are closed.
- It is determined, with the help of Life Flight, that the two friends were the only ones known to be in the area the time of the avalanche and they were not wearing beacons.

- Only a small amount of snow has released in an area where multiple start zones funnel into a single gully.
- Explosives are assembled to mitigate any hazards for the rescue teams.
- Four tracks are visible at the entry gate to Hells Canyon.
- Life Flight is able to confirm that no one else is observed in the area.
- A team of three ski patrollers enter the area with explosives, Recco and K-9.
- Explosives are used on both sides of the path which send new debris over the old debris.

Area boundary

Explosives used

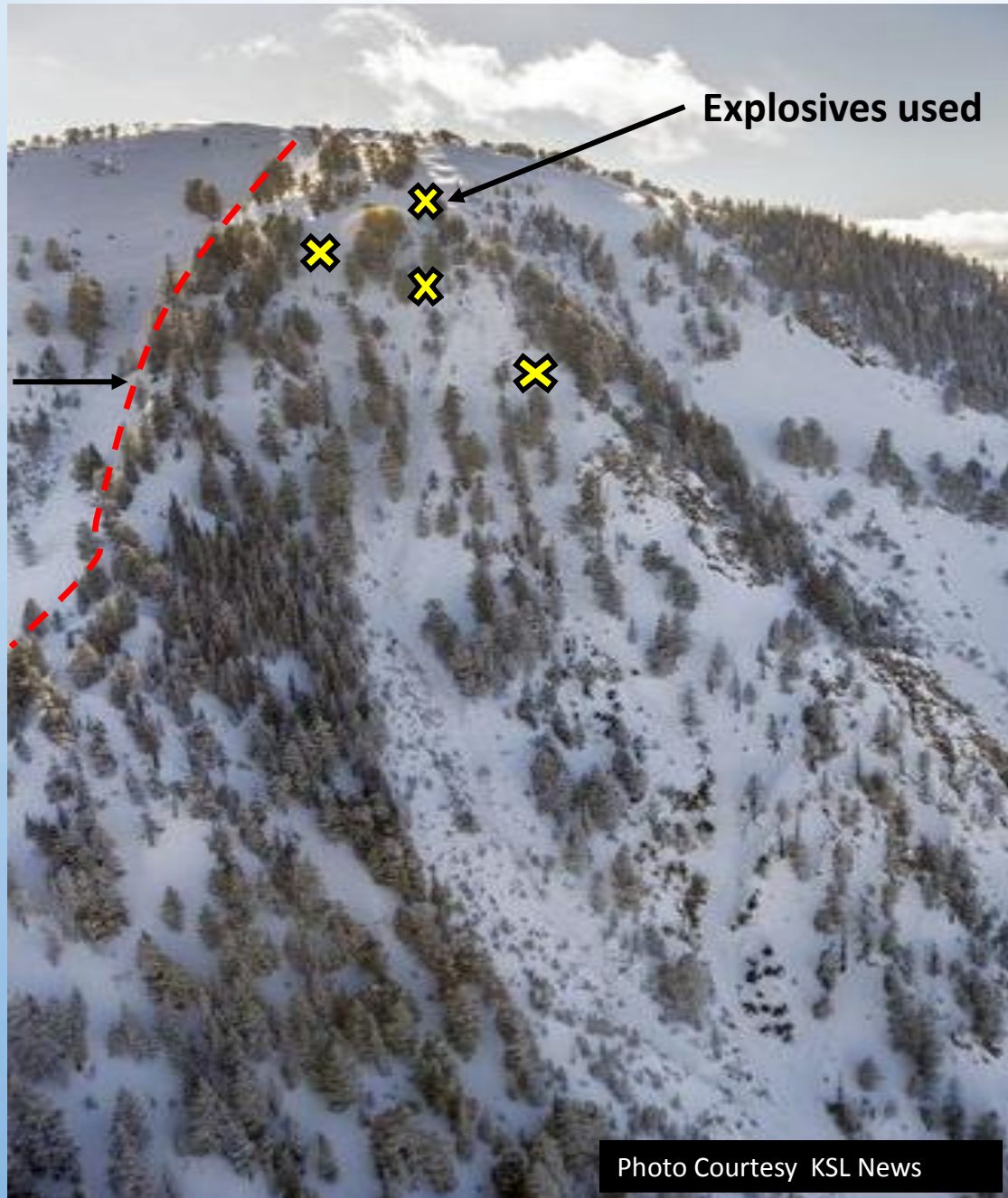
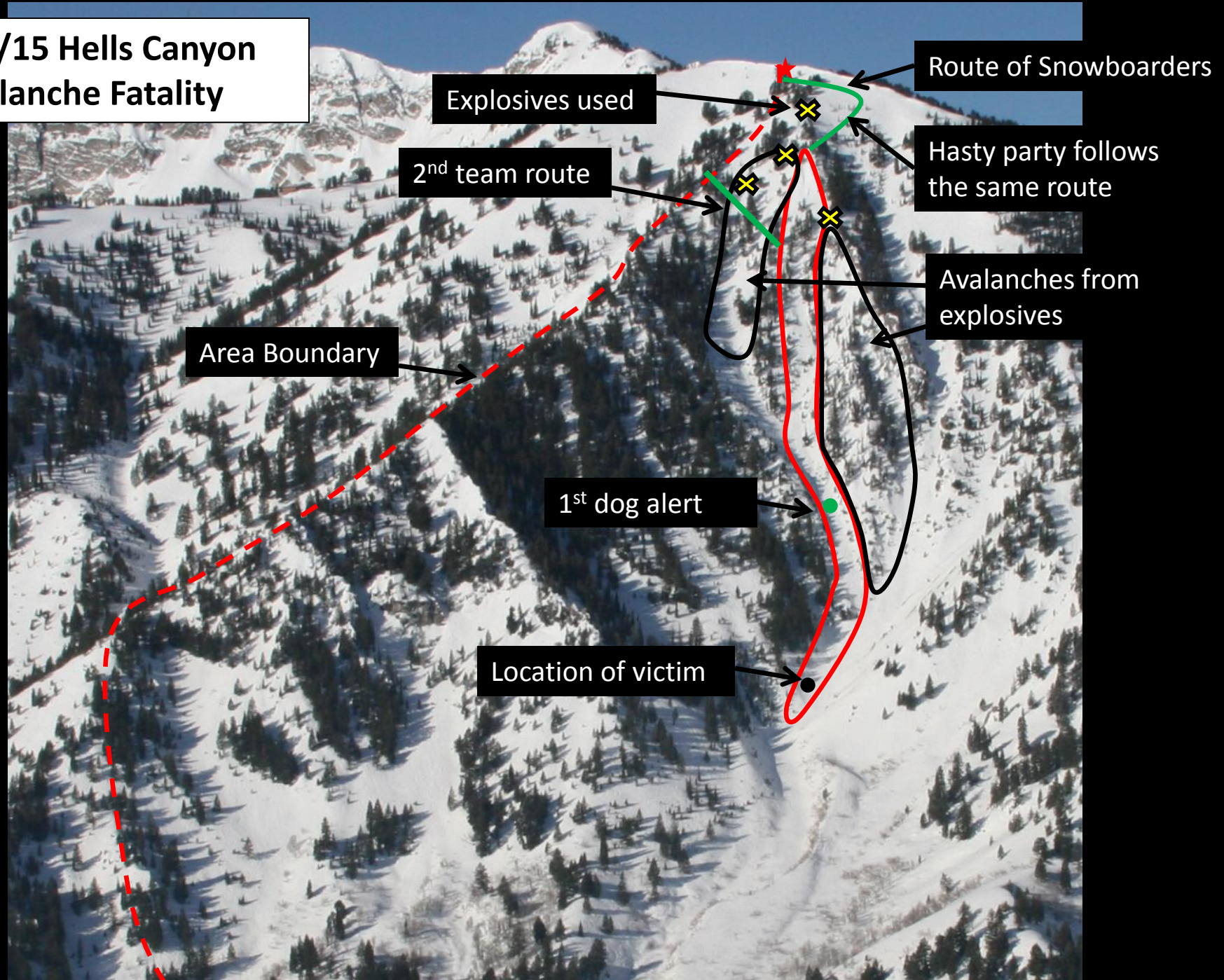


Photo Courtesy KSL News

- After explosive work is finished, a second rescue team patrollers enters the scene with witness for help with the L.S.P.
- K-9, Molly, is put into active search mode.
- K-9 has a strong alert 75 yards (68.5 m) into the deposition pile.
- Probing begins in likely areas.
- K-9 alerts again at 20 yards (18 m) from the toe of the debris.
- Dog handler has a positive strike on the second probe.
- Victim was extricated and found to have injuries incompatible with life.
- Life Flight uses hoist for the extrication. Only hoist operation in the United States

3/4/15 Hells Canyon Avalanche Fatality



Tracks of the snowboarders and rescue teams



Photo Courtesy KSL News

Crown Profile 3/8/15 NE 8700'

Storm snow 3/3/15 17"

Weak Fist Facets

Initial slab broke on weak facets and then
scoured to the ground mid path

Strengthening Facets

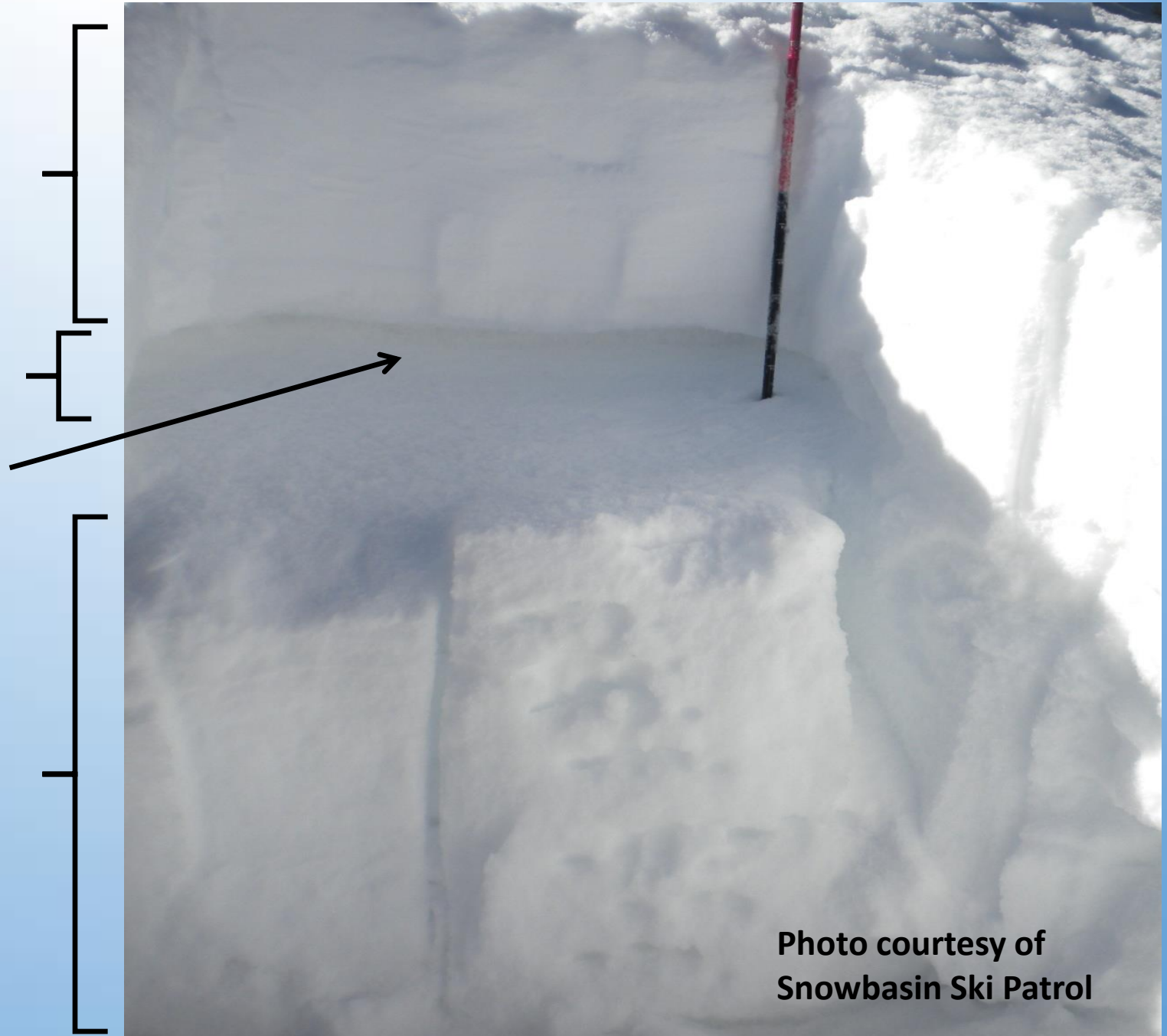


Photo courtesy of
Snowbasin Ski Patrol

Summary

This is a good example of why Wasatch Backcountry Rescue was formed in 1976 and exists today.

To have our member resorts (ski resorts), with professional ski patrols available, and partner agencies (local police and air medical etc.) working together to provide effective rescue or recovery for those in need.

Thank You

To the Snowbasin Ski Patrol for their life saving efforts and for providing the details for this incident.

To KSL for providing photos



More info@
www.wbrescue.org

