

Date: 04-18-2011

Submitted By: Alaska Mountain Rescue Group

Place: BIRD RIDGE, CHUGACH STATE PARK, CHUGACH MTNS

State: AK

Country: USA

Fatalities: 1

Activity: GLISSADING

Summary: 1 person caught and killed

OFFICIAL REPORT FROM ALASKA MOUNTAIN RESCUE GROUP

Bill Romberg, Alaska Mountain Rescue Group

ACCIDENT SUMMARY

There were no eye witnesses to this avalanche accident. However, based upon the observable clues in the area and information from friends, it would appear that the subject hiked up Bird Ridge from the trailhead on the evening of 4-18-11 and then traversed out onto the slope to descend back to the valley floor by glissading a snow slope. According to friends, the subject often selected hiking routes at this time of year with a glissade descent in mind. The subject carried a small, roll-up plastic sled which was found attached to wrist by a tether. Footprints were clearly visible heading from Bird Ridge onto the slope and then ending at a narrow track which leads to a wet loose avalanche crown. It appears that during the descent of the slope, the subject triggered a wet loose snow avalanche that swept him approximately 50m down slope through a small stand of alders leaving him partially buried on a small ledge about 3m below the alders. The debris continued down slope triggering a secondary loose snow avalanche about 60-70m below the subject that deposited debris another 100m below.

RESCUE SUMMARY

On Tuesday, Apr 19, at approximately 1040, AST Helo-1 was activated to help search for an Anchorage West High School teacher (male, age 41) who was reported overdue for work and was expected to have been out hiking the evening before (4-18-11). With the help of friends and co-workers, the subject's car was located near the Bird Ridge trailhead parking lot at approximately mile 102 of the Seward Hwy. The spotter and pilot on board AST Helo-1 observed an small avalanche on the west side of Bird Ridge at 2300 feet (Coordinates: N60 59.544 W149 28.131 WGS 84). They subsequently spotted a dark object in the path of the avalanche below a small patch of alders that turned out to be a black plastic sled attached to the partially-buried body of the subject. Helo-1 landed on top of Bird Ridge above the avalanche path to off load the AMRG spotter who carefully climbed down the slide path to the location of the subject. Two friends/co-workers out searching for the subject in the area also arrived on scene, helping to uncover the subject's body and assisting with loading the subject into a body bag that was transported off the slope via sling by Helo-1.

The subject was found with his head/torso fully buried, angled slightly head downhill, with his left arm and left leg exposed with the black plastic sled attached by a green nylon tether to his left wrist. The subject did not have an avalanche transceiver on him, nor a backpack with probe, shovel or other equipment.

A crown profile was not conducted on this avalanche for safety reasons. It was approaching the time of day when the slope begins receiving direct sunshine and there was significant potential for additional wet slab and/or loose snow avalanches. **All avalanche observations reported below are estimates based upon photos and a post-recovery interview with the rescuer on scene.**

Avalanche Characteristics

WL-AOu-R1-D2-I Triggered by subject glissading down the slope. Weak layer: most likely the top of a thick layer of faceted snow beneath snow that fell first week of April. Significant solar warming the previous three days. Time of day: exact time unknown, but after 5 pm.

Aspect: 270

Elevation: 700m (2,300 ft)

Slope Angle: 40 degrees (est.)

Width: 10 m (max)

Depth: 0.7 m (max)

Coordinates: N60 59.544 W149 28.131 (WGS 84)

PHOTOS: See Attached

MEDIA REPORT:

Troopers ID body of teacher killed in an avalanche

By [LISA DEMER](#)
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A West High science teacher died in an avalanche that was triggered as he sledged down a gully at Bird Ridge Monday afternoon, and his body was recovered today, according to Alaska State Troopers.

Dale Brabec had taught at the school since 2001, said Heidi Embley, a spokeswoman for the Anchorage School District. He taught physics and astronomy, according to the West High website.

West High principal Rick Stone alerted school staffers this afternoon. Many had kept up with the developments throughout the day, Embley said.

Brabec planned to go hiking and sledding after work Monday. When he didn't show up at school this morning, the friends became concerned and went to look for him. They found his car in the small pullout at Mile 102 of the Seward Highway at the Bird Ridge trail head, troopers said.

Troopers got a call to look for him about 10:30 a.m. today and launched Helo 1 soon after. A trooper from Girdwood and a volunteer with Alaska Mountain Rescue Group were on board.

They spotted an avalanche chute near the Bird Ridge trail. As the helicopter drew closer, they could make out clothing and what turned out to be a shiny saucer sled sticking out from the

"He was going to sled down it and the avalanche triggered," Simpson said.

The chopper landed and those on board determined the man was dead. His body was recovered about 1:40 p.m., troopers said.

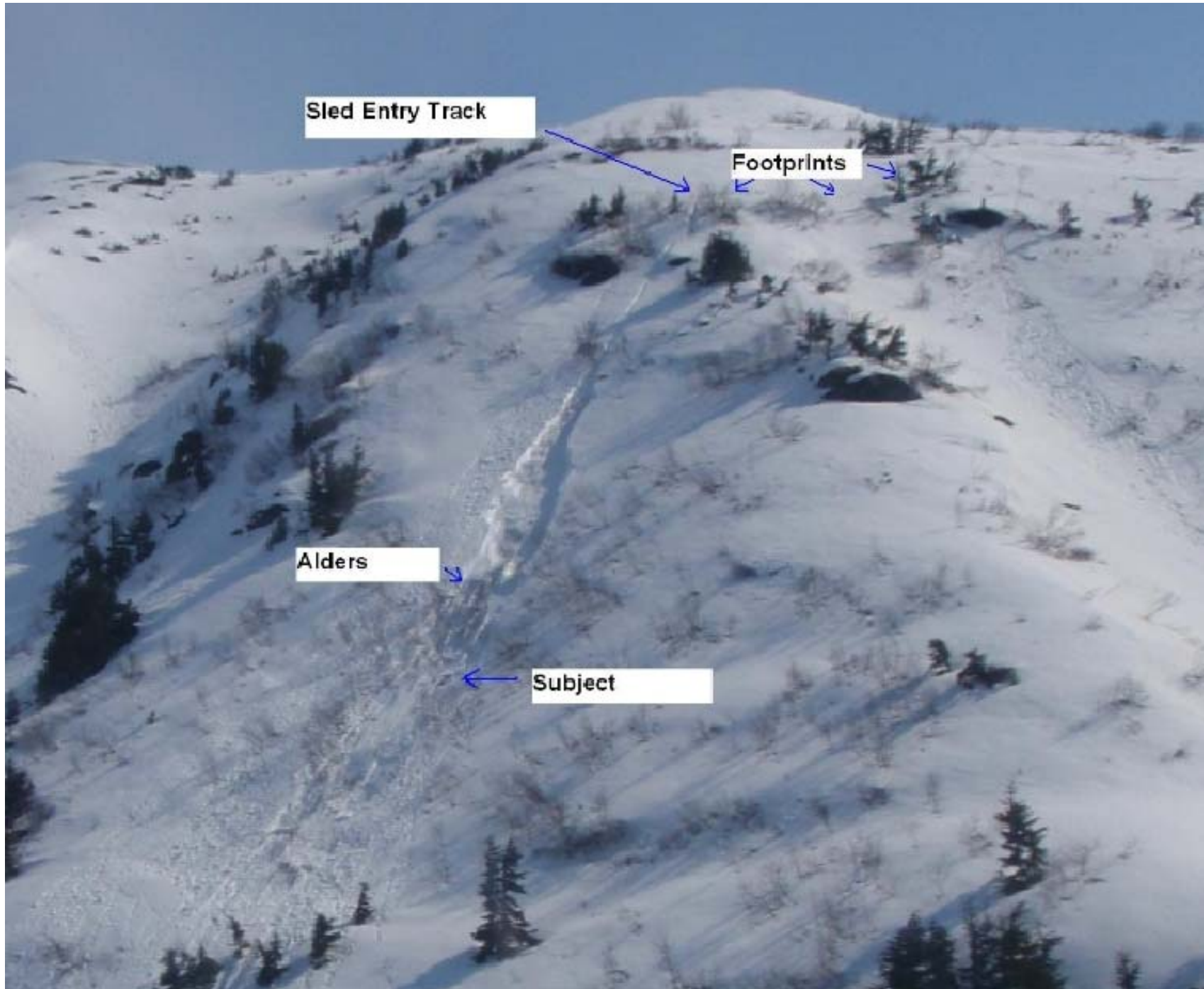
Brabec's body was found about halfway from the top of the ridge, on the Indian side, around the 1,000-foot level, Simpson said. The sled looked homemade. The avalanche started maybe 100 feet from the top of the ridge.

Brabec's friends hiked up and helped the rescue group volunteers dig out the body, the trooper said. He was buried about 5 or 6 feet deep.

The Bird Ridge trail draws hikers in early spring because it is often one of the first spots to be clear of snow. But that hasn't happened yet, said Bill Romberg, a member of the Alaska Mountain Rescue Group who was getting updates about the mission through the day. The next couple of weeks are likely to be a period of high avalanche activity, he said.

"Everyone wants to get out and hike. Down low, it's all baked off. But there's snow up high. The snow pack still thinks its winter. But it's changing fast, with the sunshine."

Reach Lisa Demer at ldemer@adn.com or 257-4390.



Sled Entry Track

Footprints

Alders

Subject

Looking up through alder patch to avalanche path from subject's location



Looking down slope from subject's location

