

Petes North - Near Miss Incident

Date: 11 February 2012

Place: Petes North, Turnagain Pass, Kenai Mountains

State: Alaska

Fatalities: 0

Summary: 2 skiers caught, 1 partially buried (uninjured) and 1 fully buried (concussion)

Avalanche: HS-ASr- R2-D2-I

This remotely triggered avalanche caught, carried and buried two skiers ascending an up-track on the westerly aspects of Petes North ridge near treeline. One partially buried (uninjured) and one fully buried (concussion).

Avalanche details:

HS-ASr-R2-D2-I

Type: Wind slab

Size estimate: 150' wide, running 5-700' x 12-18" deep

Trigger: Remote from ~20-30' left from corner of the right flank and stauchwall. (see photo)

Weak Layer: Broken precipitation particles/decomposing fragments

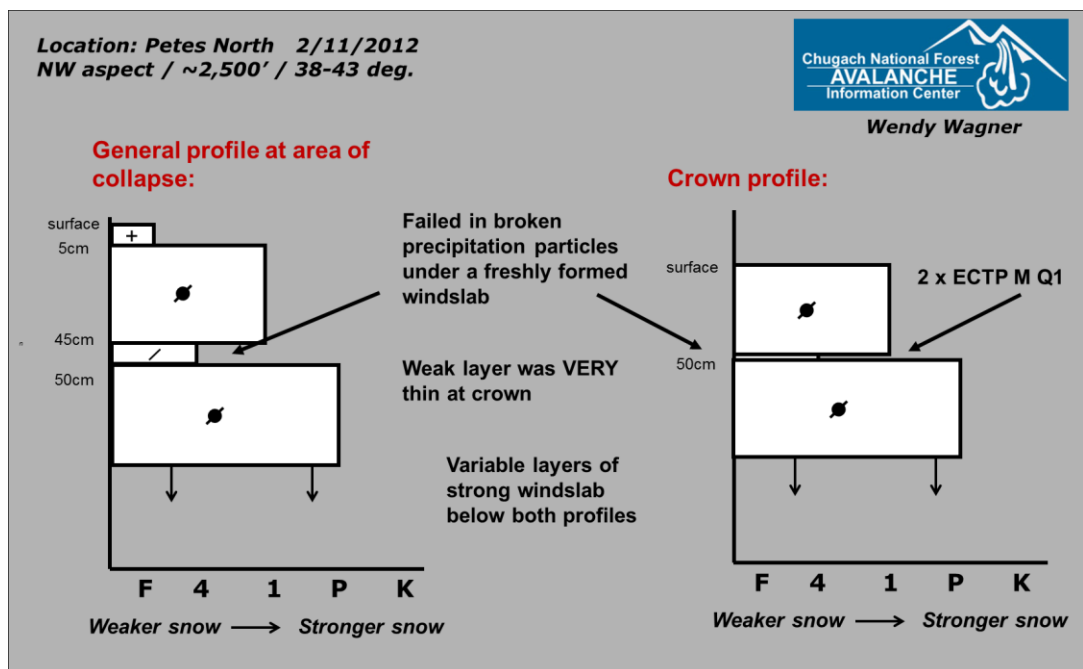
Aspect: WNW

Angle: 37-43 degrees

Elevation: 2500'

Debris: ~3-5' deep (fanned out to varying degrees)

Crown profile:



Weather: Storm day

Friday Feb. 10th, the day before the avalanche, 8-12" of medium density snow fell with 30mph east winds, gusting to 85mph. Temperatures near 30F.

Saturday Feb. 11th, the day of the avalanche, 3-5" of similar, medium density snow fell with east winds averaging 40mph and gusting to 95mph. Temperatures near 30F.

Avalanche danger rating:

CONSIDERABLE with pockets of HIGH.

Events:

The avalanche was remotely triggered by a skier from a safe, flat, ridged section of the slope just above treeline. That person felt a "collapse" which propagated to a higher elevation adjacent 37-40+ degree slope and the avalanche resulted. Five skiers were stopped at this safe area and two were still hiking up in lower angle terrain below.

The debris overran a shallow depression and was deposited on a sub-ridge/bench terrain feature with sparse trees. The two skiers still hiking were in this lower angled terrain when the debris caught them. They were believed to have been carried 150-200' with one skier partially buried and one fully buried. The latter was buried under just inches to, at most, 1 foot of snow and wedged against a small tree. The five remaining skiers mounted an excellent quick and efficient rescue. Beacons were used to locate the skier fully buried when one person noticed a hand. At this point, they were able to clear the airway and the skier was able to breathe on their own. It was estimated to take as little as 3 minutes, but possibly more, from the time of the avalanche to clearing the airway. The skier partially buried was able to dig most of himself out and help with the rescue of his partner. Both buried skiers were able to ski out on their own power.

Note:

The debris from this avalanche nicked one small 50' section in the zig-zag of the 'relatively' safe up-track (where skiers were caught). Near the toe a small section of the up-track was also covered with a small amount (1' or less) of debris.

CNFAIC forecaster thoughts:

This was a close call that we all can take something away from - some lessons learned:

- Extra caution is required when multiple groups are recreating on the same slope.*
- Never underestimate where and what terrain features an avalanche can overrun.*
- When visibility does not lend itself to seeing the whole picture clearly, placing a skin track even more conservative than you may think necessary could save someone's life - and possibly the life of a person from a different party.*
- Keep your rescue skills honed - KUDOS to these skiers for their excellent quick response!!!*
- Always keep your beacon batteries fresh.*

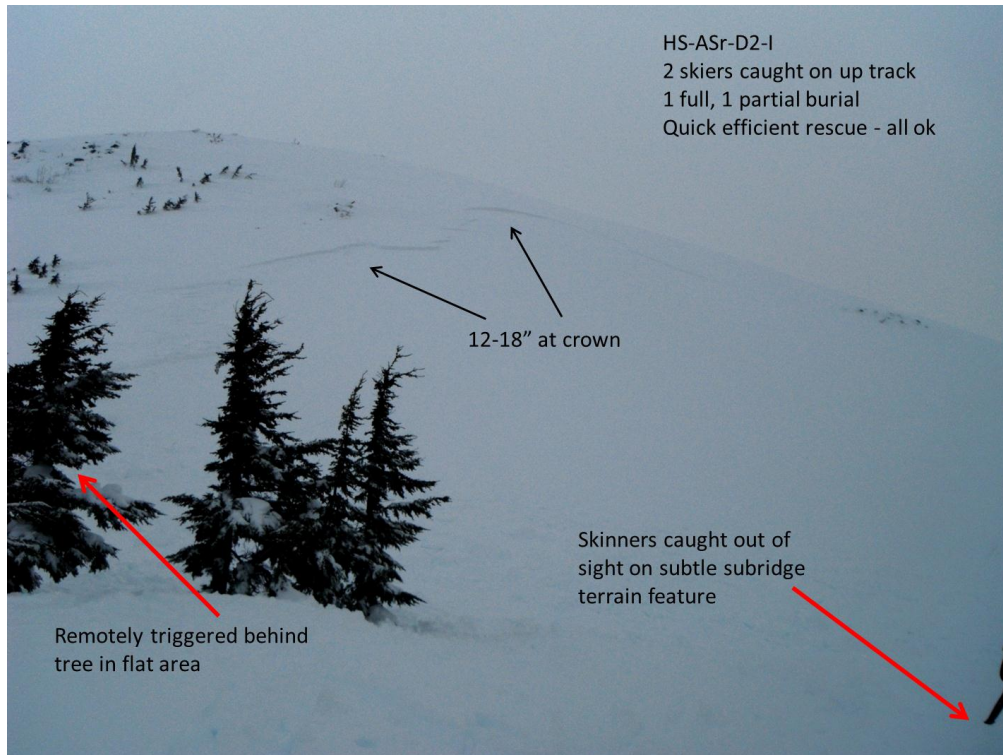


Photo of debris taken from site of full burial

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