

# Liam Walsh Avalanche Accident

## 11/22/2015

### Liam Walsh Avalanche Accident

---

## Avalanche Details

- Location: Eldorado Bowl, Hatcher Pass
- State: Alaska
- Date: 2015/11/22 (Estimated)
- Summary Description: 1 backcountry tourer caught, buried, and killed
- Primary Activity: Backcountry Tourer
- Primary Travel Mode: Ski
- Location Setting: Backcountry



### Number

- Caught: 1
- Partially Buried, Non-Critical: 0
- Partially Buried, Critical: 0
- Fully Buried: 1
- Injured: 0
- Killed: 1

### Avalanche

- Type: —
- Trigger: —
- Trigger (subcode): —
- Size – Relative to Path: —
- Size – Destructive Force: —
- Sliding Surface: —

### Site

- Slope Aspect: —
- Site Elevation: —
- Slope Angle: —
- Slope Characteristic: —

---

## Events Leading to the Avalanche

The victim's friend DW reported having a phone call at 1314 on the day the victim went missing. The victim informed DW that he was heading up to Hatcher Pass to go skiing. The phone call was dropped due to a poor signal. Another call was made at 1317 indicating that the victim was at the Independence Mine upper winter parking lot. The last communications with the victim were received by DW via text at 1334 indicating that the victim was beginning his tour.

The victim's close friends have stated that the victim knew the avalanche hazard was high, but that he was going skiing anyway. The victim reportedly told one friend who did not own a beacon that he should not join him given the avalanche danger that day.

The victim was reported by close friends as an expert skier, but new to backcountry skiing. He is described as a creature of habit. Originally his friend DW thought the victim would have skied Micro Dot that day, since this was perhaps the only ski run the victim knew well at Hatcher Pass.

Obviously the victim chose a different route that day, perhaps due to the worsening weather conditions, the fading sun light, and the fact that Skyscraper Mt had a well defined up track that was easily seen from the parking lot, even as the weather was worsening, cloud levels lowering and visibility reducing.

I happened to be in the parking lot that afternoon. I was with Allie Barker and we observed a solo snowboarder ski the east face of Skyscraper Mt. He triggered an hard slab avalanche (D2) on his 6th turn from the top. He swam, deployed his airbag, and escaped to the flank without injury. This avalanche dusted the parking lot with a powder cloud. There were approximately 20-30 people socializing outside of their cars at the moment. Some people jumped into their cars for safety. The debris pile came within 30 feet of the parking lot, the crown height estimated at 4 feet deep, cross loaded feature.

As we were leaving the parking lot with the sun going down, the weather storm taking hold, and visibility deteriorating, we thought we could see a lone person climbing the north sub-ridge of Skyscraper Mt. We watched until the weather and fading light made it impossible to see. This information was later used to identify the high probability area for search and rescue.

## Rescue Summary

Sunday 11/22/2015, victim, male 33, of Wasilla, headed to Hatcher Pass to ski alone. Last seen around noon. Expected back Sunday evening. Light gear, not prepared for overnight. Probably with avalanche transceiver. Hatcher Pass avalanche center had warned of high avalanche danger.

Monday 11/23: Subject reported missing at 1916 hours. Alaska State Troopers located his vehicle in parking lot uphill from Hatcher Pass Lodge.

Friday 12/18. IMT conference call. Going to "wait until spring" strategy. Consulted on message to family, public. AST Sgt. Michelyn Pylilo now Liaison Officer.

Sunday 05/21/2016. Large search effort in upper Eldorado Bowl. 25 searchers and 6 dogs on mountain. Possible clue: ski pole found, but subject's friends said not owned by subject. Possible clue: 2 dog interests in upper right segment 24. Dog interest area thoroughly probed, but snow still too deep for probes to reach ground.

Sunday 05/29. Scout in upper Eldorado Bowl by Ralph Baldwin and one other skier, no dogs. No surface clues found.

Wednesday 06/08. 7 searchers plus 2 dogs to upper Eldorado Bow. 1 searcher to Hatcher Pass road to glass south flank of Skyscraper. Subject located (visual, with binoculars) by about half an inch of metal binding above snow surface. Confirmed by dog and RECCO. Dug out and transported by AST Helo to Anchorage. Position lower boundary of segment 22, almost in gully.

