



# The Powder Cloud

Newsletter of the Utah Avalanche Center

January 2021

Support the UAC

## What's New



### It's Not a Game of Chance

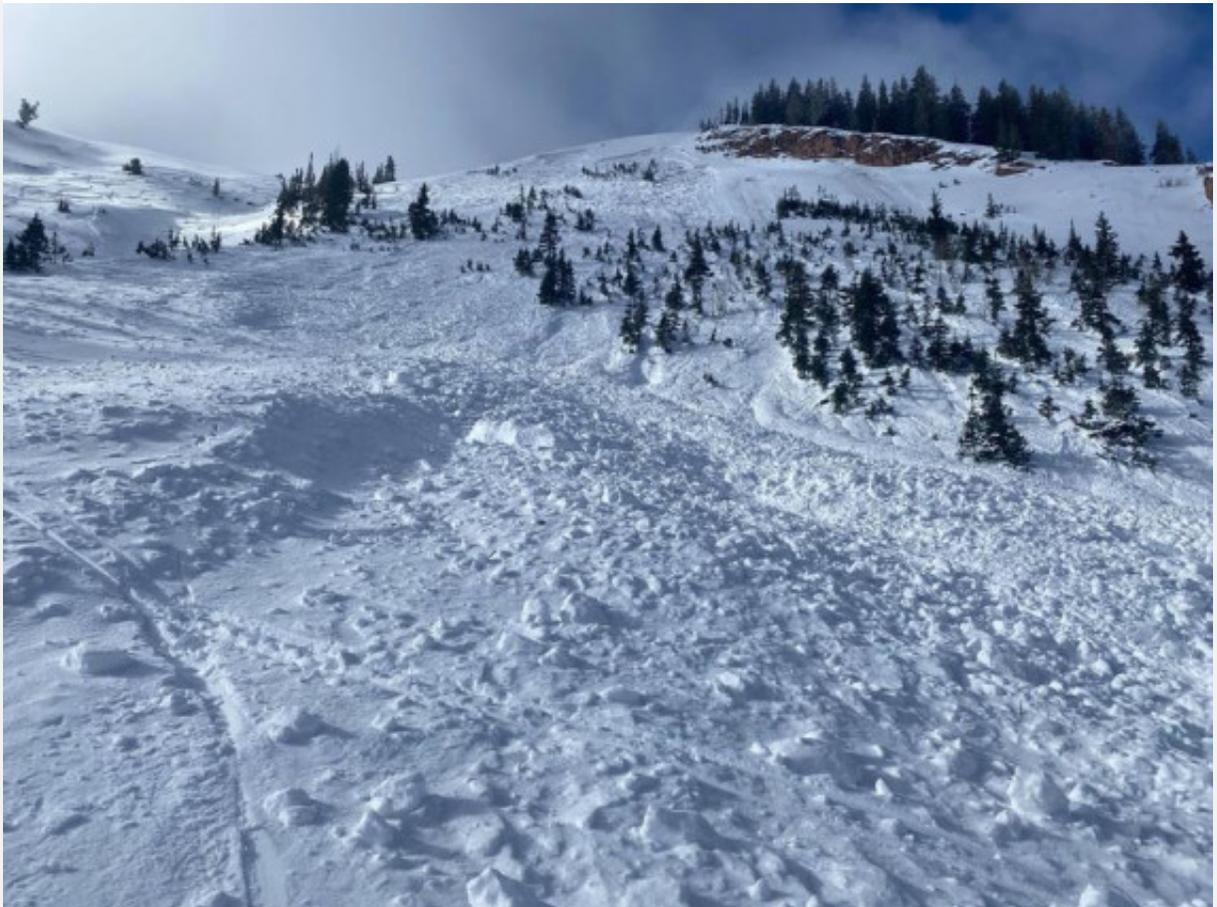
This winter has been one for the books so far and not necessarily in a good way. Low snowfall has led to a weak snowpack and coverage is still well below average around the state. If you think light thoughts you can ride off the road in certain places and perhaps ride meadows without nailing rocks and downed trees. Despite the departure from normal snowfall, people are still getting out into the Utah backcountry and they are triggering avalanches. On January 8th we had [one avalanche fatality](#) and [one very close call](#). The fatality involved a snowboarder leaving Park City Mountain Resort and entering the Dutch Draw area. He was without avalanche rescue gear (beacon, probe, and shovel) and unfortunately did not survive the large avalanche.

The close call happened when three friends were riding their Timbersleds in Steep Hollow in the northern Bear River Range. They were avoiding steep slopes but unfortunately rode beneath one that fractured above them and buried one of the riders. Lucky for him he had a beacon and of the two that weren't caught, one had rescue gear as well. He admittedly had never used his beacon but, despite his lack of experience, was able to pinpoint the victim's location and subsequently perform a successful rescue. Had the victim been under the snow for any more time the outcome likely would have been tragic.

The difference between these two outcomes comes down to preparedness. The snowboarder entered avalanche terrain and did not have the essential rescue gear. Without a beacon, there was little chance of him being found in time. The close call shows that having the gear can make all the difference in the world, even with minimal training. He survived because he had the essential rescue gear and his partner was able to perform a rescue.

We talk endlessly each winter about the importance of carrying a beacon, shovel, and probe and knowing how to use them. We don't say it flippantly. Having avalanche rescue equipment and knowing how to properly use it can sometimes be the difference between life and death. You can never be over-prepared when it comes to avalanches. Practice like your life depends on it. And travel with partners who do the same.

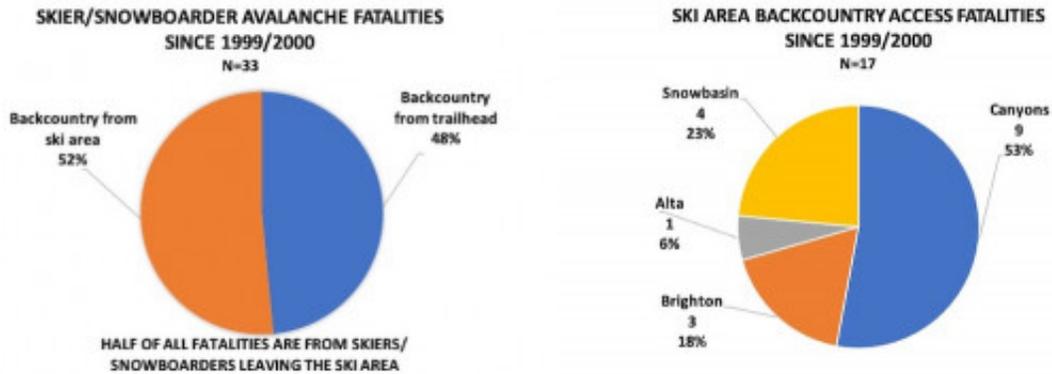
Sadly, Utah had its [second avalanche fatality](#) on January 30 in Square Top off the Park City ridge line. Both skiers had the gear and had practiced with it, but unfortunately, due to the nature of the terrain, the slide was too big and the victim was unable to be rescued. The victim was a seasoned outdoor traveler and long-time resident of Park City. Our condolences go out to everyone affected by this tragedy.



# Telling Statistics

- Since 1999/2000, Utah has had a total of 67 avalanche fatalities.
- About half (33) are skiers/snowboarders.
- Half (17) of those left a ski area to access the backcountry.

Remember, sidecountry is backcountry. Even though you can often see this terrain from the resort, as soon as you exit a resort gate, you are in the backcountry. You need to have avalanche rescue gear and the training to make safe decisions and perform a rescue if needed.



## Education



The UAC's on-snow education programs are in full swing for the 20/21 season. Although the winter has been thin, and the snow switch has been slow to flip, the UAC

has delivered over 30 avalanche courses to over 500 students so far.

There are [classes available into February](#), with more to come. In these avalanche classes, you learn how to identify avalanche terrain, use your avalanche rescue equipment, and travel through the mountains safely in the wintertime.

With so many new users entering the mountains this season and resorts becoming increasingly crowded, more folks are entering the backcountry, and the first step to doing so safely is becoming educated about the dangers of snow and avalanches.

If you have any questions about avalanche education, please reach out to our education team at [education@utahavalanchecenter.org](mailto:education@utahavalanchecenter.org).

## Tech Tips



In the world of avalanches, slope angle is everything. We can't control the weather or the snowpack but we can control where we choose to travel. Avalanches rarely occur on slopes less than 30 degrees with the most active angle being around 38 degrees. In our forecasts we often suggest staying off of or out from under slopes steeper than 30 degrees to avoid avalanche problems. But how do we know how steep a slope is?

The best way to measure slope angle is to use an inclinometer. They come in all shapes and sizes from a plastic card with a hanging plumb bob all the way to smartphone apps that also measure elevation, GPS coordinates, and aspect. You can measure the slope from the side, top, or bottom as long as you are in a safe zone.

No matter what tool you use, it is critical to your safety to know how to measure slope angle. It could be the difference between a fun day and a tragic day. Here are a few tutorial videos about how to measure slope angle:

- [Bruce Tremper tutorial](#)
- [American Avalanche Institute](#)
- [Ski-Doo Avalanche Education Series](#)

# Giving Back to the UAC



## We Can't Thank You Enough!

YOU ARE AMAZING! You have supported the UAC with such generosity over the past year so we want to take this opportunity to thank you for giving back to make our work possible. As a nonprofit we strive to give you as many free resources as possible to help you stay educated and able to make good decisions when traveling in the backcountry. Generous donations of \$5 to \$10,000 from individuals like you have helped us provide forecasts, observations, video tutorials, Know Before You Go, education and awareness programs, virtual presentations, and much more!

We are excited to have welcomed many new donors in 2020 as well as continuing to have support from those dedicated community members who have given for many years! Additionally, many businesses, both small and large, have supported the UAC through monetary and in-kind donations and we encourage you to [support the businesses](#) that support our work.

Give yourself a pat on the back and don't be shy to let the world know that you are a proud member of the UAC's backcountry community! Get out there and safely enjoy the snow knowing that you are helping us save lives as a UAC backcountry hero.

Thank You!

## The Details

## Upcoming Classes

- [Feb 5 & 6: Splitboard BC101](#)
- [Feb 4 & 5: Snowshoe BC101 - SLC](#)
- [Feb 10: Avalanche Rescue Clinic - SLC](#)
- [Feb 11 & 12: Backcountry 101 - SLC](#)
- Feb 13: Skyline Beacon Clinic - Details coming on Skyline forecast
- [Feb 15 & 16: Backcountry 101 - SLC](#)

[More Class Info](#)

## Upcoming Classes

- [Feb 18 & 19 - Backcountry 101 - SLC](#)
- [Feb 24: Youth Avalanche Rescue Clinic - SLC](#)
- [Feb 24 & 25: Backcountry 101 - SLC](#)
- [Feb 26 & 27: Backcountry 101 - Tushar Range](#)

[More Class Info](#)

## Stay Connected

[Forecasts](#)

[Avalanches](#)

[Observations](#)

[Events](#)

[Education](#)



---

Copyright © Utah Avalanche Center, All rights reserved.

Our mailing address is:

P.O. Box 521353  
Salt Lake City, UT 84152  
United States

[Unsubscribe](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [Opt-Out](#)

The Utah Avalanche Center is a cooperative effort between the Forest Service Utah Avalanche Center and the non-profit Utah Avalanche Center