Top Notch Peak

Date
Sun, 05/16/2021 - 16:16
Activity
Skiing

There were three of us from Billings that took a day trip to ski Top Notch.
Late afternoon ski decent off of Top Notch Peak in Yellowstone Park - Sylvan Pass, really warm, and a three layer cake. Lots of temp variations throughout the afternoon. The weather was overcast and mostly above freezing. We had small periods of light rain and snow throughout the afternoon. After leaving the summit at 4pm we skied down the skin track to the main drainage into the gut of the northwest bowl. There was clearly new snow blown in from the previous day or so, as it was much more white than the surrounding snow. First skier descended with a ski cut and everything stayed put. At that point she committed herself to the run and made one turn and the snow let go. She was caught, and took the ride down the gut of the run. She was totally unharmed, kept her skis on, and wasn't buried. She picked herself up and made her way out of the run out zone and to safe spot. I didn't take time to really analyze the snow after the fact, and simply skied down the debris field and out of the run with the other skier. It broke at least 6" deep, and 25' wide, and ran about 40 yards, or the main gut of the ski run. If I had to guess, the snow was saturated from previous rains and then that new snow loaded up on top of it was just too much for it. It wasn't just a surface slough either, at least to my knowledge. The debris field piled up blocks of snow ranging from 1-2' in size.

I did not see any avy activity during the day, and no other slides were obvious to me. I noticed there were some bigger slides that had happened at some point in the past when some cornices broke off and left some very large car-sized blocks of snow in one of the other bowls. Our group was communicating well, and no one had "the feeling". This was a case of simply ignoring the signs and looking for the quick out back to the car. I think we got lucky that no one was hurt or broke a binding or something. It very easily could have turned into a torn ACL and a long miserable day. Many lessons learned.

I know this was awhile ago, but I remember hearing requests for reports on any and all avy activity, even outside of the normal area. I don't know if you guys want this info or not, but i'll report it regardless. Everyone learned some valuable lessons that day.

Region
Out of Advisory Area
Observer Name
Andrew Wilson