AVALANCHE ACCIDENT REPORTING FORM
UTAH AVALANCHE FORECAST CENTER

I. General Information

1. Date: 14 January 1995

2. Time of Accident: Approximately 1100 hrs.

3. Exact Location: Ben Lomomd Peak, Cutler Ridge area

4. Victims: Richard L. Scothern
Devon N. Wheeler

5. Eyewitnesses: None

6. Damage to vehicles, building, lifts, etc.:

Damage to two snowmobiles

II. Accident Summary

1. Events leading up to the accident.

Scothern and Wheeler, along with Gregg Chambers and Douglas Wheeler, were snowmobiling in steep bowls on the east side of Ben Lomomd Peak. Gregg and Douglas were in one area with Richard and Devon out of sight in another. Gregg and Douglas drove over to check on Richard and Devon, finding a large avalanche.

2. Accident account

No witnesses

III. Rescue

1. Self-rescue and hasty search:

Neither of their friends were visible but Devon's snowmobile was sticking out of the debris near the bottom of the slide. Unable to locate either victim, Chambers called the sheriff's office on a cellular phone at 1126 hrs, requesting help. Chambers then descended by snowmobile to North Ogden Park.

2. Description of search procedures:

Brad Randall of the Weber County Sheriff's Office responded, meeting Chambers in North Fork Park at 1215 hrs. Randall had already contacted the Weber County Mountain Rescue Team (WCMRT) who were in route, as was the Jeep Patrol with snowmobiles. Chambers confirmed that two victims were buried. Life Flight was contacted and responded. Kay Chapman, an avalanche worker from

Powder Mountain Ski Area was brought in to assess the avalanche danger at the accident site. A safe landing zone and staging area was located near the slide and seven WCMRT members were flown in to begin a search. Two Jeep Patrol members reached the scene by snowmobile.

3. Time, location, and position of victim when found:

Devon Wheeler was found by probing at approximately 1500 hrs. He was against a tree 15 feet up hill of his snowmobile.

4. Depth of victim, length of burial, and condition and injuries: Wheeler was buried about 5 feet deep for 4 hours.

5. Cause of injury or death: Suffocation

6. Secondary search and body recovery:

After considerable effort involving probing, shoveling, trenching and snow removal with a snow cat, the body of Richard Scothern was found on January 22. He was buried head down, about 12 feet deep among trees.

IV. Weather and Snowpack Data

1. Weather synopsis:

A series of storms began on January 5 that deposited considerable snow in the Wasatch. By January 14 the Alta Guard Station had recorded about 80 inches. Very strong winds, sometimes reaching forty to sixty mph from the Southwest, also plagued the mountains. January 15 was a break day between storms although strong winds 20 to 40 mph, with gusts to 75 mph were recorded on Mt. Ogden the pervious night and Snowbasin ski area reported 6 inches of new snow on the morning of January 14.

2. Snowpack structure:

While the nature of the avalanche and adverse weather conditions limited the amount of snowpack data received, several snow pits on adjacent slopes revealed a 12 to 18 inch layer of faceted snow, produced by the December clear spell, that was presumably the weak layer. The slope is heavily loaded by southwest winds, providing the overlying slab.

3. Were there warnings, restrictions, or closures in effect?

No

V. Avalanche Data

1. Type of slide(s) (classification): HS-4-AS

2. Dimensions width: 200 feet
length: 500 feet
vertical: 200 feet

3. Crown height: 6 to 11 feet

4. Debris width: 300 feet
length: 200 feet
depth: Up to 25 feet

5. Other comments:

There was no weak layer present in the crown face. The very hard slab was able to pull back into strong snow. A rock outcrop in the center of the bed surface probably had associated faceted snow and the slide ma/y have been triggered in this area.

VI. Terrain Data

1. Elevation at crown:
at toe:

2. Aspect: Northeast

3. Slope angle in degrees, starting zone: 40 degrees
toe of debris: Not measured
Alpha angle from toe to starting zone: Not measured

4. Vegetative cover (open, timbered, etc.):

Open with conifers in the lower deposition area

5. Shape of path (open slope, gully, etc.):

Concave bowl dropping into a confined gully

6. Other comments:

For a relatively small slide path it is about as bad a place to get caught as you can find.

VII. Conclusions and Recommendations

An increasing number of close calls in the 1990s made this first snowmobile fatality inevitable. Human nature seems to require disaster to be the catalyst for change. We hope that Utah snowmobilers will respond with the eagerness to learn that backcountry skiers have shown in recent years.

Even if we except the fact that traveling in avalanche terrain involves some degree of risk, this accident need not have become an extended tragedy. With little or no information concerning the

snowpack and the recent weather, one of the victims might easily have triggered and been caught in this slide. But practicing standard safe travel techniques would have limited the victims to one rather than two. If Scothern had not been buried, he might have been able to rescue Wheeler. Indeed, if Wheeler had been wearing a transceiver, Chambers and Doug Wheeler might well have found him alive.

The extended search for Scothern would have been greatly shortened if the victims had been wearing avalanche transceivers. While transceivers do not guarantee survival they do guarantee that 65 searchers don't spend a week digging for your body while the wife and kids wring their hands in the parking lot.

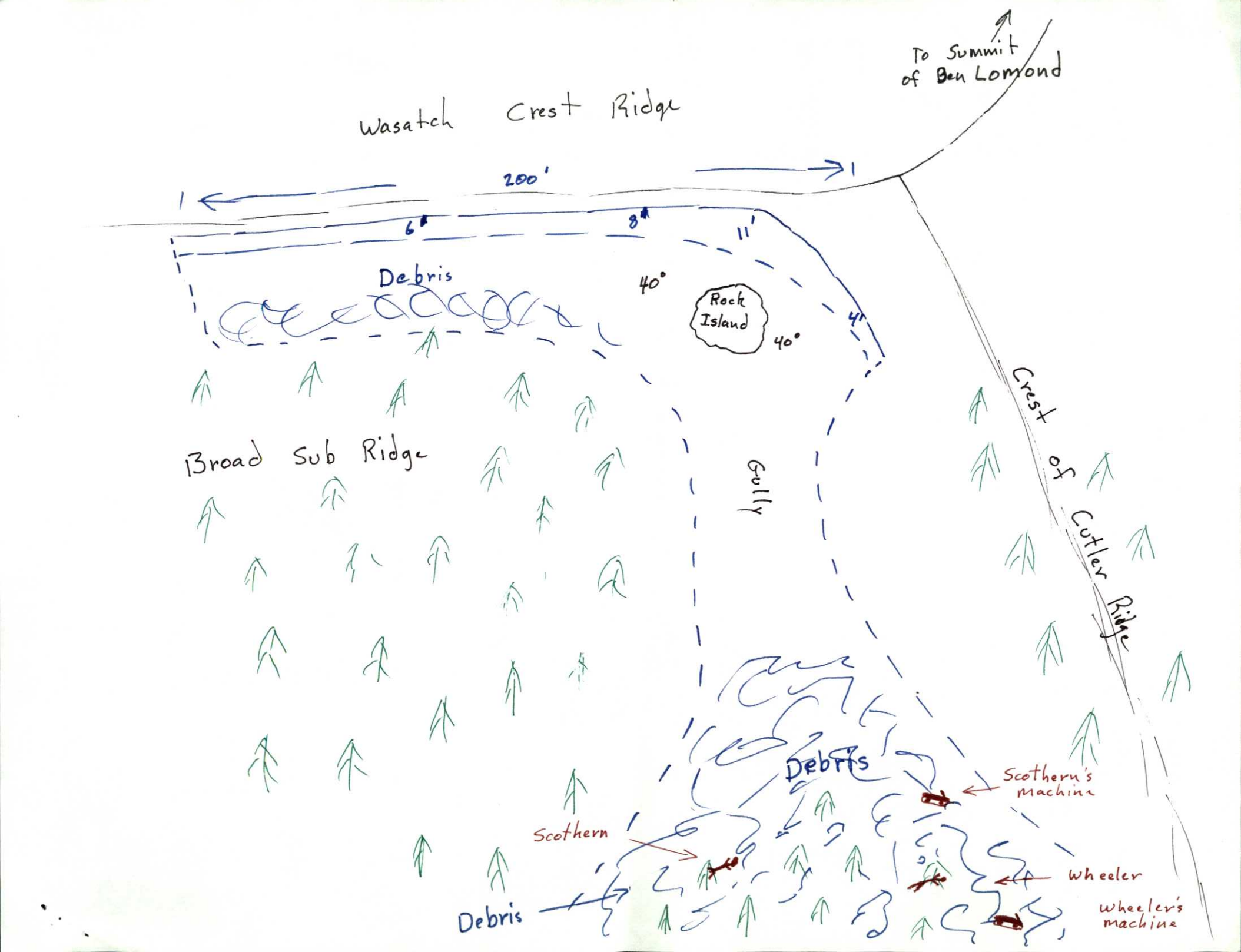
People knowingly traveling in avalanche terrain for recreation owe themselves, their families and society the advantages provided by an avalanche transceiver.

Attachments:

Sketch of avalanche

Pit profile of adjacent slope

Weber County Sheriff's Report


To Summit of Ben Lomond
Wasatch Crest Ridge
200'
6'
8'
11'
4'
Debris
40°
Rock Island
40°
Broad Sub Ridge
Gully
Crest of Cutler Ridge
Debris
Scothern's machine
Scothern
Wheeler
Debris
Wheeler's machine

Location: Cutler Ridge
Aspect: North East
Elevation: 8800 Feet

Data from a snow pit near the North flank of the slide Path