

I was there. Not on that ridge then but nearby.

Some details:

Under the upper slide the runout was long but narrow. Yes, he triggered it himself from the top. Its not 45 deg. The classic convex rollover of the slope and the classic 35 to 40 degs. At the top there was a layer of wind slab as the wind the days prior had been coming directly from behind (straight into the camera). Which is what made it the hot spot. More notably it happened at 1pm. That morning I made a safety comment to my group to be very wary at 1pm as temps would affect the snowpack. Also everyone skiing were clearly warned of the bad layer in those shady NE aspects. But, yes, many had traversed it in the morning prior to the slide. Propably making it look safer than it was.

Situation:

I'd skied that exact ridgeline into that bowl the day before.



We'd opened the lookers upper right of the slope you see in the photo where the many tracks can be seen. Tucking under to lowest rock in that part of the slope we'd traversed skiers right to get to just below the bigger rock you see on the lookers right edge of the avalanche path. It forms a small ridge which is normally a safe spot to regroup. Under 30cm of snow there was 50cm of graupel and sugar. While the top 30cm held OK it was clearly not good and we got the hell out of there FAST to avoid all such aspects that day and the day of the slide.

Search:

A local guide saw it happen and could see where the skier was dragged. He called to some of his colleagues nearby to come assist. They proceeded directly to the deposit zone, searched, located and got to him in 21 minutes. Dead. The autopsy showed his

neck was broken.

That bowl is now being called Shaggy's bowl. Some of the ski alpinism saavy locals don't agree with the new nickname as they say many have bit it in that bowl before the lift was built. To them it's a know slide zone.

I was there. Not on that ridge then but nearby.

Some details:

Under the upper slide the runout was long but narrow. Yes, he triggered it himself from the top. Its not 45 deg. The classic convex rollover of the slope and the classic 35 to 40 degs. At the top there was a layer of wind slab as the wind the days prior had been coming directly from behind (straight into the camera). Which is what made it the hot spot. More notably it happened at 1pm. That morning I made a safety comment to my group to be very wary at 1pm as temps would affect the snowpack. Also everyone skiing were clearly warned of the bad layer in those shady NE aspects. But, yes, many had traversed it in the morning prior to the slide. Propably making it look safer than it was.

Situation:

I'd skied that exact ridgeline into that bowl the day before.



We'd opened the lookers upper right of the slope you see in the photo where the many tracks can be seen. Tucking under to lowest rock in that part of the slope we'd traversed skiers right to get to just below the bigger rock you see on the lookers right edge of the avalanche path. It forms a small ridge which is normally a safe spot to regroup. Under 30cm of snow there was 50cm of graupel and sugar. While the top

30cm held OK it was clearly not good and we got the hell out of there FAST to avoid all such aspects that day and the day of the slide.

Search:

A local guide saw it happen and could see where the skier was dragged. He called to some of his colleagues nearby to come assist. They proceeded directly to the deposit zone, searched, located and got to him in 21 minutes. Dead. The autopsy showed his neck was broken.

That bowl is now being called Shaggy's bowl. Some of the ski alpinism saavy locals don't agree with the new nickname as they say many have bit it in that bowl before the lift was built. To them it's a know slide zone.

Here's a picture of the path:



edit: the arrows didn't save. Anyways, start is near the crest of the spine just lower right of the text, burial is below right of the burial location text.

Sunday, February 11, 2007: 13:00pm

views: 1012

From: [the nord](#) In category: Skiing

[Kashmir, India](#)

0 thumbs up



[Avy Crown](#)



[Avy Crown Detail](#)



[From Middle of Bowl](#)



Length of Avy

As skiers we care about avalanche deaths because we know it could happen to any of us. Unless the avy strikes in our own backcountry we typically learn little more than names of the victims and its size.

Heartfelt condolences to Shaun's family, and please forgive me for writing up what happened, but I feel it's important for the rest of us to know.

Gulmarg is a small community and although I didn't know Shaun we interacted a few times. One day I traversed past an area where he was building a massive snow cave with his friends. We talked later that night at the Bakshi's restaurant. Another time we talked about Srinagar. He seemed like a good dude and I've learned from Australian newspapers that he was an accomplished climbing photographer as well as a seasoned backcountry skier. The latter proves the point made in most avy books and courses: the more knowledge, the greater the chance of succumbing to the white death.

Skiing Gulmarg's Agharwat Mountain is no joke. The high-alpine terrain is, with the exception of two bowls, not patrolled or controlled.

I believe it's important to learn from and understand the tragic accident that claimed the life of Shaun four days ago. I've had a chance to read the ski patrol's internal memo on the incident, talked to snow safety expert Jimmy Roberts (who left for California today) who was site commander, and studied photos taken that day. With that in mind I'll attempt to piece together what happened.

After twelve days of inactivity due to mechanical failure the top gondi opened for a few hours in the afternoon on Feb 5. Although many people hiked to the top when the gondi was out of commission, skier traffic, which helps stabilize the snow pack, was lower than usual.

A storm prevented the gondi from opening for the public on the sixth. Ski patrollers ski cut avalanche zones in the ski area boundary (the boundary includes only two bowls on either side of the gondola) and released a size two avy that ran 500 meters.

On February 7, ski patrol performed more control work, but no new avalanches were released. The patrol completed its control work a little after 11 a.m. and a crowd of 80-100 powder-hungry skiers waited impatiently by the gondi loading zone.

Posted on the white board by the gondola's loading zone February 7:

BACK COUNTRY ADVISORY

In the last 48 hours up to 1 metre of snow has accumulated on ridgelines lee to the South. Ski cutting yesterday in the Ski Area produced 1 significant SLAB on a NE Aspect – The SLAB was 20cm – 90cm Thick, 50M wide and ran 500 metres.

**BE VERY CAREFUL IN THE BACKCOUNTRY
HAZARD IS HIGH.
BACKCOUNTRY TRAVEL NOT ADVISED**

In addition to the written advisory, snow safety expert Jimmy Roberts addressed the crowd on the poor backcountry conditions.

The gondi started loading at about 11:40 a.m. and people gunned for fresh lines both in and out of bounds.

At 12:55 p.m. Jimmy and another patroller witnessed the avy break from the gondi on their way to the top.

Shaun skied a line down the face and 100 by 200 meters of snow began to move. The snow picked up momentum, brought more with it. Shaun got caught and was seen traveling fast in the middle of a white inferno until the slide moved past the ridge and out of view from the patrollers on the gondi.

Jimmy contacted another patroller via radio. The patroller had just exited the gondi. Within two minutes, four patrollers jetted down towards the slide area.

No more than ten minutes after the slide they pinpointed the signal from Shaun's transceiver. A quick probe yielded success and within a couple of minutes 5-6 people was busy digging.

About 1:09 p.m. they uncovered his lower leg and ski boot 80 cm below the surface. It took another three minutes to uncover Shaun's face from the snow. There were no signs of life.

Twenty minutes of CPR and chest compressions performed by a rotating cast of patrollers and helpers followed, but to no avail. Shaun looked cyanotic and was soon pronounced dead.

The class two avy released 500 vertical meters above and ran for a kilometer, transporting Shaun with it the whole way down.

Unfortunately his death is not likely to be the last on Apharwat. It's a big mountain. Please be careful and pay respect. As Billa says, "Mountain is bigger than you," and I'd like to see it tomorrow and the next day, you know?

Please accept my deep regrets and condolences.