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2 skiers caught, 1 killed in slide

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An avalanche in Darby Canyon on the west slope of the Tetons killed a skier visiting from Colorado on Saturday when it swept him and his brother more than 1,000 feet, officials reported.

The slide broke about 5 p.m. near 10,000 feet on the main shelf of the canyon near the Wind Cave, killing Paul Maniaci, who was reportedly in his mid-20s, according to the Teton County Sheriff's Office, Teton County coroner and the Bridger-Teton National Forest Avalanche Center. Maniaci's brother, Pete, a resident of Teton County, Idaho, also was carried by the slide but survived.

Sgt. Kelly Wells, who investigated the incident for the sheriff's office, gave the following account of the incident, which occurred in a Wyoming canyon most easily reached from Idaho.

The brothers were working their way to the summit of a southwest-facing slope near the Wind Cave when they entered a gully near the top. Pete Maniaci, in the lead, felt the snow settle. It then fractured approximately 10 yards above him.

His brother was 20 yards below and the slide took them both down a ravine. The avalanche center reported the slide ran 1,500 feet.

When the avalanche stopped, Pete Maniaci was able to free himself from the snow. He immediately skied down to more debris and began searching for his brother using an avalanche transceiver.

A cell phone call caused interference with the transceiver but allowed him to tell the caller, his girlfriend, of the incident. She relayed the information to the Teton County Sheriff's Office, which received a report at 5:01 p.m.

Pete Maniaci shut off his cell phone, continued his search and located his brother about 5:10 p.m. He dug Paul free, finding him without breath or pulse.

He performed cardiopulmonary resuscitation until rescuers arrived a short time later. Paul Maniaci never responded and CPR ceased at 6:05 p.m.

County Coroner Bob Campbell said Paul Maniaci died of trauma and suffocation caused by the avalanche. The avalanche center reported the slide buried the victim 4 feet deep.

Avalanche danger the afternoon of the incident was predicted to be low, a condition when avalanches are unlikely except in isolated pockets.

"Clearing skies late in the day and warm temperatures likely played a role in this event," forecasters said Sunday morning. "Backcountry travelers need to pay attention to the signs of significant warming and alter their plans accordingly. These signs progress from sunballs to pinwheels to wet-loose sloughs."

The avalanche report is updated twice a day and is available at www.jhavalanche.org or by telephone at 733-2664.

Paul Maniaci was to celebrate a birthday Sunday. He is survived by his wife, Jessica, who was visiting the area with him, Campbell said. Pete Maniaci is the manager of Peaked Sports in Driggs, Idaho. A public service for his brother is expected to be announced soon.

Because of avalanche danger, difficult terrain and other safety issues, Teton County Search and Rescue did not recover the body until Sunday.

Paul Maniaci is the second avalanche victim to die in Teton County, Wyo., this winter.

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