

Cornice Fall

1 snowmobiler triggered, caught, not buried, and injured
Caribou-Targhee National Forest, Centennial Mountains, Idaho
20 March 2018

Synopsis

A group of six riders from Montana were on the ridge between Sawtell Peak and Mount Jefferson (approximately 9300') when one rider walked over to edge and broke a large cornice. He tumbled north into Rock Creek drainage, sliding over at least one 40-60' foot cliff. The cornice gouged out the terrain below but did not release a secondary avalanche. The rider was injured and was seen walking below. His partners called 911 after the avalanche and once they reached him they requested an air ambulance. The rider had undetermined internal injuries. Fremont County Search and Rescue responded to the 911 call and arrived after the patient was evacuated. They assisted in getting the group, and the rider's snowmobile, back to the trailhead.

Location

N 44.558705°, W111.468777°

<https://www.mtavalanche.com/images/18/cornice-avalanche-centennial-mtns>

Weather

The nearest weather station is White Elephant SNOTEL (7710') located 3.5 miles to the southeast of the accident site. Under partly cloudy skies the temperature rose to a high of 33F at 12:00 p.m. at the station, meaning temperatures on the ridge were likely 20-25F. The Lionhead weather station, 13.5 miles to the northeast, showed 10-20 mph wind from the southwest all afternoon. The last snowfall was on 17 March when 4" fell (.4 inches of snow water equivalent).

Avalanche Danger

In nearby Lionhead, Montana, the avalanche danger on 20 March was rated LOW for dry snow avalanches. The snowpack at Lionhead is typically similar to the Centennial Mountains. The snowpack was measured 175 cm deep on 15 March when the GNFA last visited Lionhead. There were no widespread weak layers and the stability was rated "Good". The overall strength and stability of the snow likely inhibited a larger avalanche being triggered by the cornice fall. In the day's advisory, it read, *"Our snowpack lacks widespread weak layers and our avalanche concerns are limited to small pockets of wind-blown snow and cornices breaking off along ridgelines."*

Avalanche Advisory: <https://www.mtavalanche.com/advisory/18/03/20>

The details for this report came from interviewing Cy McCullough, a member of Fremont County SAR who responded to the incident.

Report authored by:
Doug Chabot, Director, Gallatin National Forest Avalanche Center
dchabot@fs.fed.us
406-587-6984

