

The Powder Cloud



Newsletter of the Utah Avalanche Center

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March 2018

What's New

UAC Podcast

Did you know the UAC started a podcast this year? We have released 7 episodes since December. Host Drew Hardesty and producer Ben Bombard have been interviewing guests, bringing a new format to your avalanche education. You may not be a podcast listener, but we think you will love these interviews. Tom Kimbrough, Don Sharaf, Jim Steenburgh, Anna Keeling, and Bill Nalli are just a few of the people you can learn from. Check it out on the [UAC blog](#), [iTunes](#), [Stitcher](#), or wherever you get your podcasts.

New UAC Board Members

Alongside the hardworking staff of the Utah Avalanche Center, a volunteer [Board of Directors](#) supports the UAC in pursuit of our mission - to keep you on top of the greatest snow on earth. We are pleased to grow our ranks with six new board members, who have been recruited based on their commitment to the UAC's mission and willingness to lend their talents and skills to further our goals. With your support, we're excited to work together to continue providing the tools and resources you need to enjoy the backcountry and come home safe. Please join us in welcoming these skiers, riders, and backcountry enthusiasts to our board:

- Alan Richards
 - Caitlin West
 - Jacob Splan
 - Liz Pederson
 - Nicole Summer
 - Tyler Hansen
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The UAC Extends Our Gratitude To Our Supporters

You may have noticed over the past few years that the UAC staff are looking a lot sharper than we used to. Thanks in large part to our partnership with [Outdoor Research](#) (OR), gone are the days of Kowboy's ragged coat collection as well as any perception that we're just a bunch of dirtbags digging around in the snow. We take our work as seriously as OR takes designing top-rated outerwear and we use, abuse, and provide design feedback on OR gear while continually pressing to learn more each time we go out into the mountains. With generous support from OR, we are able to produce in-depth, accurate advisories as well as teach avalanche classes to hundreds of eager students all while staying warm, dry, and comfortable.



We couldn't do what we do without their help. Thanks OR! You can support both OR and the UAC when you [buy OR gear](#) using the [UAC Affiliate Purchase Program](#).

We are also grateful for our motorized support. We couldn't get out on the snow across the state without the great support from Polaris, Ski Doo, and Arctic Cat as well as KTM and Timbersled. Our local dealers make it happen. Big thanks to Tri-City Performance, Weller Recreation, Northstar's Ultimate Outdoors, Big Pine and Morgan Valley Polaris. We use these machines to monitor the snowpack and teach life-saving classes across the state of Utah. [Check out this year's UAC Sleds.](#)



Meet the Forecaster

Toby Weed



What is your personal background?

I grew up and in Keene, in the Mt. Monadnock region, southwest corner of New Hampshire. I started skiing and playing in snow at a young age, and was captain of my high school nordic ski team.

How did you get into avalanche forecasting?

As a ski patroller at Park City in the late 1980's, I became fascinated by snow and avalanches. I had the opportunity to learn about snow directly from legendary avalanche professionals, seasoned ski patrollers, other novices, my own mistakes, and a few life-changing experiences. As an avalanche

control route leader and novice backcountry skier, I realized an obvious need to learn to be my own avalanche forecaster and to get to better know snow.

How did you start working at the UAC?

I was finishing my Liberal Arts degree and living in Central Vermont, when I applied for the Logan job, and Bruce Tremper offered me employment with the Forest Service Utah Avalanche Center. I started work in early February 2003 with the Logan Ranger District on Wasatch-Cache National Forest as director and sole forecaster of the Logan Avalanche Center (then Bear River Avalanche Information Center).

What was your greatest learning moment about avalanches?

The moment of my greatest learning almost killed me. I was caught, carried, partially buried, pinned on aspen trees and injured by a large human-made hard slab avalanche while skiing alone in a closed area as a young ski patroller.

I learned tons as a route leader, triggering numerous avalanches testing my theories and stability assessments with explosives and slope cuts. Even more, for several years with a duty to focus on snow and mountain weather, as apprentice and assistant to Snow Safety Director. The moment I became snow safety director at Park City in 1997, I realized despite years of learning, there remained much that I'll never understand about snow, avalanches, and people.

What would you tell a 25 year old version of yourself?

- You don't know what you don't know.
- Be a student of the mountains.
- Forever strive to improve situational awareness and communication skills.
- Make conservative decisions in the mountains based on facts, not emotions.

What's one piece of advice you have about avalanches?

As Liam Fitzgerald once told me, "Never assume anything."

What do you like doing besides playing in the snow?

Living vicariously through my kids and supporting them through driving, belaying, and cheering them on. I also enjoy fly fishing, wildland firefighting, moderate alpine climbing, adventure hikes with the dog, building projects around the house, and evening barbecues in the backyard with family and friends.



Learning From Your Mistakes

The only way we learn as a community is by sharing stories. The only way we learn as individuals is by reflecting on our actions and learning from them. As Tom pointed out in "[Fallibility and Fessing Up](#)", we all make mistakes and when we do make them, it takes a big swallowing of some innate pride and some mounting up to the fear of reprisals to publicly admit to them. In light of learning from his mistake after being caught in the



January 26 Meadow Chutes Accident, Peter Ingle took time to reflect on what went wrong and what he learned. He had some very good learning lessons and we recommend taking time to [read his full account](#).

- **Communicate** more when new people join your group.
- **Consider** all possible runout zones, not just where you are skiing.
- **Stopping mid slope** is necessary *sometimes*.
- **Know what rescue gear** you and your partners have, *in advance*.
- **Remember** that a lot of accidents, not just skiing, happen at the end of the day. You are more tired, you have been focused for a long time already, and home sounds good. Keep it together right until you get to the car.
- **The Wasatch is getting crowded**. I often feel pushed to ski different areas so I can get untracked powder. This impacts the places I go and the decisions I make.
- **Never give up**. If you are caught, remember to breathe, fight for air, protect your head, swim and do so all the way.

Tech Tips

Do Airbags Really Work

Avalanche Airbag packs are a great safety tool worth considering. According to the latest research:

- Wearing an airbag reduces your chance of dying from 22% to 11%.
- The above statistic means that half the people who die in avalanches could be saved if they were wearing an airbag pack. That's a 50% reduction in deaths!
- If they don't prevent burial, they can limit burial depth which is an important factor in survival. Burials deeper than 6 feet are almost always fatal.

Just like the airbag in your car, there's no guarantee that you'll survive a head on collision at 80 mph. However, they can make a big difference and we wouldn't consider buying a car without one. Early claims about avalanche

airbags made it sound like they would keep everyone alive. Unfortunately, the truth is a little more complicated. There are many cases in which avalanche airbags are not effective. For starters, 2 out of 10 people wearing one will not be able to deploy it for various reasons. They also won't work in avalanches that travel a short distance or put debris in a deep terrain trap. Lastly, they don't necessarily protect people from hitting trees or rocks that cause 1 out of 4 fatalities. [Read a complete article about this topic.](#)



Get Up to Date UAC Notifications

Are you staying up to date with avalanche conditions as they change? You can get important updates from the UAC via text message directly to your phone with two simple steps:

1. **Text 40404**
2. **In the message section, type "Follow uacwasatch"**

That's it! As the UAC posts changing conditions, you will get notified.

Want to see photos from what is going on in the backcountry on Instagram? Search **#utavy** for updates.

Giving Back to the UAC

UAC Affiliate Programs

Spring is in the air! As you are gearing up for climbing, running, mountain biking or fishing, your purchase can help support UAC operations. Backcountry.com, [REI](#), and Patagonia are just a few of the companies that support the UAC. When you purchase through the UAC Affiliate Program, not only do you get your goods from companies that care, but you also continue to support the UAC. It's a win-win-win situation! [You can see a complete list of our affiliates and other way to support the UAC here.](#)



The Details

Visit the [UAC page](#) to see a full list of classes by the UAC and by other providers

Upcoming Classes

Our classes are over for this season. Check back in late summer for our 2018-2019 class schedule.

Upcoming Events

September 13: Black Diamond Parking Lot

- 25th Annual Black Diamond Fall Fundraiser: It is hard to believe our fall fundraiser is a quarter century old. Come join us for our silver celebration

October 26-27: 11th Annual Utah Snow and Avalanche Workshop

- We have a new format with 2 full days of education this year.
- Friday: Pro only session
- Saturday: Open and Motorized sessions

Update Your Information

We are working to update our contact database. [Please use this link to update your UAC profile.](#)

Our mailing address is:

P.O. Box 521353
Salt Lake City, UT 84152
United States

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The Utah Avalanche Center is a cooperative effort between the Forest Service Utah Avalanche Center and the non-profit Utah Avalanche Center