



## BC Zone Observation Report

Sunday, April 3, 2016 at 12:00 AM

DATE FILED: May 10, 2017 Northern San Juan  
CASE NUMBER: 2016S26

### Details

- Date: 2016/04/03
- Observer: Public

Filed in the \_\_\_\_\_ Court  
San Miguel County, Colorado

MAY 10 2017

### Location

- BC Zone: Northern San Juan
- Area Description: West face of the Little Wasatch Ridge
- Route Description: The Oblivion Bowl and the Grandfather Couloir

### Weather

- Weather Description: Sunny, bluebird day. No wind. About 30 degrees and warming. Oblivion Bowl faces NW and the Grandfather Couloir faces West, the couloir begins at about 13,000 feet and drops down to 10,400 feet.

### Snowpack

- Snowpack Description: Spring snowpack. Very stable base with some new snow that was still running it's wet-sluff course on most aspects. Some surface hoar present in the bowl. Still very dry up on the higher elevations and moving/sluffing very fast.

### Avalanches

- Avalanche Description: The day was already very warm and there were dozens of backcountry party's out that day, our first two red flags. We gained the ridge (13,000) at 11:00 and were switched over and ready to drop by 11:20. At this time another party passed us on the ridge, they said they were headed for Grandfather couloir. The Oblivion bowl hangs precariously over the lower Grandfather, putting the lower couloir and rappel in very high risk. A member of the party took down my phone number and told me he would call when they were out. We watched them ski down the entrance and into the couloir. And then we waited. We slowly made our way towards the rock that marks the entrance to the Oblivion. There was no spot that we could situate ourselves that we could see the Grandfather apron, so we waited. The Grandfather is a big line, and so when I still did not get a call half a hour later I figured maybe there was some difficulty. But then 45 minutes later, I wondered if maybe they didn't have service down in the Bear Creek drainage. It was at this time I had my third red flag and should have just backed off. I know that any kind of miscommunication should be dealt with in the safest possible way, which would be finding an alternate route back down into the drainage back to town. But it was the last day the chairs were spinning, we had gotten up on the ridge, and here we were ready to drop. There were other party's behind us and the sun was cooking the snow. Every minute the bowl was getting more dangerous to ride, and when we couldn't drop at 11:30 and instead had to wait until 12:20 we should have just decided to pull off. Things just hadn't lined up. But we decided to drop it anyways, I figured it had to have been enough time. I took 4 or 5 big turns down the main face and then traversed left to my first safety. I knew there was probably some snow moving as I continued to work down the left side of the bowl, everything steepening and growing tighter. As I came down towards the choke

and my second safety, I knew I had some pretty serious sluff working so I stayed left of the gut. Suddenly it ripped past me, much more snow than I had been anticipating. It had gained ferocity with the steepness of the slope and by the time it poured into the Grandfather couloir it was a full on sluff-avalanche. I was far enough left to be able to make it to my safety, but the snow was still continuing to gain momentum as more and more of the bowl started to move with it. I pulled out left behind a rock and watched it pour down and into the Grandfather. Too many people out today, we waited too long and everything was too warm, not getting the phone call and dropping anyways; even if they weren't still in the couloir, there was enough snow moving to seriously take someone out if they were traversing across the apron from the very popular Waterfall chute. We had made too many mistakes on Sunday and ignored too many red flags, the party of two was still at the rappel station in the couloir. I believe one member of the party was swept from the rappel station and out the bottom, although I am not sure. She bruised her left arm and was very shook up from the incident. We are extremely lucky that everybody involved was able to walk away without any serious injuries. This incident could have been easily prevented if we had simply listened to the clues.

## Media

### Images

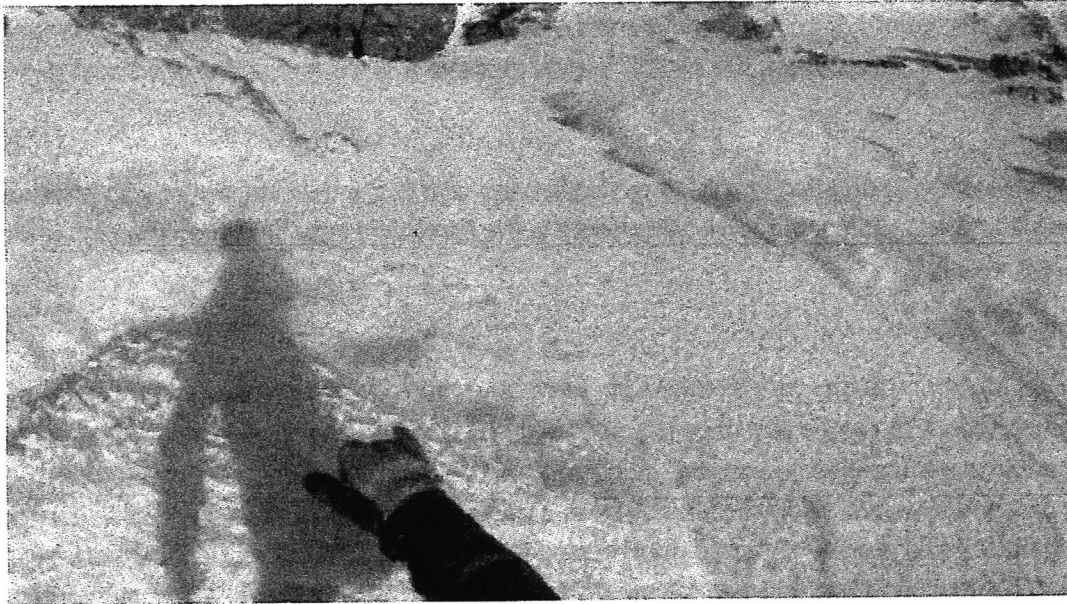


Figure 1: sluff



Figure 2: sluff