

Deep and Stabilizing in Portal Creek

Date

Tue, 01/14/2025 - 12:20

Activity

Snowmobiling

We rode into Portal Creek to the ridgeline above Hidden Lakes and back below Windy Pass. During our ride, we noted no avalanche activity or signs of instability. We dug twice to the ground. Once above Hidden Lakes and once in the corner of an [avalanche path](#) below Windy Pass.

Bottom Line:

- The snowpack is DEEP. The measured HS was "1 Dave" or 6'5" (200 cm).
- [Stability](#) is looking good in our pits, and we are optimistic.
- ECTNs—mid teens within the layers of the post-Christmas storm snow.
- [Faceted snow](#) near the base of the snowpack is hardening and rounding. Even with extra prodding (deep taps and an unofficial cross-slope PST), we couldn't get it to break or propagate failure.
- The mountain range is expansive, and one must assume spatial variability on both slope and certainly the range scale, but this is good.

Big Picture:

- Other than one avalanche that appeared to break on persistent weak layers below Maid of the Mist, Ian and I couldn't think of another persistent [slab](#) avalanche in the Northern Gallatin Range.
- [Wind Slab](#) avalanches are the most likely issue.
- Danger is dropping quickly.
- We don't trust facets often and aren't ready to write off the basal weakness, but triggering an avalanche on these layers seems unlikely for now.
- This puts [wind slab](#) avalanches as the primary concern... and it hasn't been very windy. So, this seems limited for now.

Terrain Recommendations:

- It is appropriate to consider riding and skiing in avalanche terrain if one is willing to accept the inherent levels of uncertainty involved with steep, backcountry terrain.
- We are pessimistic by nature and like to hedge our bets. The way to do this is by selecting terrain *less likely to avalanche* (not as steep, more uniform in depth—less rocky, potentially shallow areas, and not wind-loaded) and terrain with *lesser consequences* (smaller slopes, fewer terrain traps, clean runouts).

Region

Northern Gallatin

Location (from list)

Portal Creek

Observer Name

Dave Zinn