

Cataract Creek Basin, 45.6320, -111.9983

Date

Sun, 02/28/2021 - 14:00

Activity

Skiing

My partner and I planned to ski Hollowtop Mountain in the Northern Tobacco Root range and we approached from Cataract Creek Basin. As we traveled along the ATV road to the basin, we noticed a lack of snow in the basin and many wind-scoured slopes. Once we reached Lower Mason Lake, we had a pretty clear view of our route up Hollowtop and unfortunately saw that it was completely wind-scoured. Wind was whipping through the range and had scoured slopes on North, West, and East aspects - only the Southern aspects were spared but even then the snowpack was relatively shallow in places.

We performed a hand hardness and ECT test on a sheltered SE facing slope at 8850 feet of elevation with a pit snow depth of around 140cm. The hand hardness test revealed a well consolidated and rounded slab that is lying atop a 60 cm foundation of different facet layers. These were some of the largest facets I have seen this season! The ECT resulted in an ECTN 19 and ECTN 20 across different small crust layers about 20-30 cm under the surface. The fracture character for both breaks was PC, Q3. We then did an informal "Rutschblock Test" above our ECT cut. My partner went to the back of the ECT and stepped and then jumped onto the back of the block. After four hops, the ECT cut failed and after seven it fell over, breaking on the facet layer 60cm above the ground. This failure also clearly identified several other slabs in the snowpack that did not propagate on our ECT but definitely exist. Pictures of those slabs, including the large consolidated blocks are included below.

We skied the south facing slope several times and noticed a lot of variability within the snow coverage of even that slope. The wind picked up throughout the day and a lot of snow transportation was visible.

Region

Out of Advisory Area

Location (from list)

Other place

Observer Name

Haylee Darby