

Longs Pass Avalanche Fatality Summary

January 9th, 2026

Report by Katie Warren and Payton Schiff

Incident Summary

On January 9th, 2026, a group of four backcountry skiers were recreating in the Longs Pass area of the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest, approximately 17 miles North of Cle Elum, Washington. The group skied two runs on west-facing aspects between 5300 and 6300 ft. They then moved to a generally S-facing slope at similar elevations. All four skiers stopped approximately 200 vertical feet below the ridgeline and transitioned to downhill mode below a prominent rock feature at 6300ft. At approximately 3:40 pm, Skiers 1 and 2 descended the slope and stopped on a minor, low angle rib separating two prominent gullies. Skier 3 descended almost all the way to Skiers 1 and 2 when Skier 4 began their descent. The avalanche occurred just as Skier 4 started skiing downhill, fracturing above them at the base of the rock.

The avalanche caught and carried all four skiers, and debris flowed into both gullies. Skiers 1 and 4 were partially buried and able to self-extricate. Skiers 2 and 3 were carried approximately 300 vertical feet into the western gully. Skier 3 was partially buried with only a ski exposed, and Skier 2 was fully buried. Both Skiers 2 and 3 did not survive.

Occurrence Time and Date: Approximately 3:40pm Jan. 9, 2026

Time First Reported to SAR: 4:40pm

Recovery/Rescue Time: Skier 3: ~4:20pm, Jan. 9th, 2026, Skier 2: ~11:47pm, Jan. 10th, 2026

Lat/Lon: 47.45039, -120.92985

Location: Longs Pass, Kittitas Co, Okanogan-Wenatchee NF, WA

Number in Party: 4

Number Caught: 4

Number Partially Buried, Critical or Not-critical: 3 partial burials, 2 not-critical, 1 critical

Number Completely Buried: 1

Duration of Burial: Skier 3: ~40 minutes, Skier 2: ~20 hours

Number Injured: 1

Number Killed: 2

Avalanche Type: Hard Slab (HS)

Trigger (estimated): Skier (AS_u)

Size: R3 / D2.5

Start Zone Aspect: S

Start Zone Angle: average 38°, range 22-45°

Start Zone Elevation: 6300 ft

Height of Crown Face: 8 inches (20cm) (est. minimum) - 30 inches (75cm) (est. maximum)

Width of Fracture: 400 ft (120 m) (est. maximum)

Vertical Fall: 1000 ft (300m) (est. maximum)

Slab Characteristics: Decomposing Fragments, 1 Finger to 1 Finger+ Hard

Weak Layer Characteristics: Rounded Grains/ Rounding Faceted Grains, .5 mm, 1F hard

Bed Surface Characteristics: Melt-Freeze Crust, Pencil Hard

Burial involved a terrain trap: Yes, trees and gullies

Number of people that crossed start zone before the avalanche: 3

Avalanche occurred during: Descent of the 4th skier on the slope

Location of group in relation to start zone during avalanche: Skiers 1 and 2 were stopped in the runout on a minor low angle rib. Skier 3 was descending on skis just above where Skiers 1 and 2 had stopped. Skier 4 was in the start zone when the avalanche occurred

Avalanche Safety Gear Carried:

Skier 1: transceiver, shovel, probe, airbag (not deployed).

Skier 2: transceiver, shovel, probe.

Skier 3: transceiver, shovel, probe, airbag (not deployed).

Skier 4: transceiver, shovel, probe.

Signs of Instability Noted by Group:

None reported but noted wind-affected surfaces

Extent of Injuries or Cause of Death:

Skier 1: Lower Leg Injury

Skier 2: Awaiting coroner's report

Skier 3: Awaiting coroner's report

Skier 4: No injuries

NWAC Forecast Zone: East Central

Avalanche Danger Rating: Considerable at middle and upper elevations, Moderate at lower elevations

<https://nwac.us/avalanche-forecast/#/forecast/8/177477>