

Snowpack tests could lead to better decisions

By Chris Lundy, Backcountry

Early in my avalanche career I was in the field one day with a local forecaster. Based on the snowpack tests we performed at the edge of an avalanche path, we agreed that conditions on that slope were borderline, but we didn't think it would slide. Stepping into my skis, I triggered a large collapse and watched in horror as a three-foot crown shattered the slope inches from our pit.

That event went down in my memory as a powerful lesson on the limitations of snowpack tests.

Backcountry skiers and riders have been taught to dig pits for years, but the elephant in the avalanche education room has always been what role they play in your decision making. All too frequently we use them to judge whether or not a slope is safe to ski—what do you expect when they're often called "stability tests?" These tests, however, have serious limitations—both in the accuracy of their results and their interpretation—and, when applied incorrectly, can cause more harm than good.

Read the whole story