



Photo by Nancie Battaglia

The party skied the narrow slide on Wright Peak without incident before moving to the adjoining wider one, where the avalanche occurred.

►► After that it was just being tumbled. I was hitting things, but I had no idea where I was going or which way was up. When it stopped everything was really quiet. I couldn't move. I felt no pain at that point, just a sense that I can't believe this is happening. I didn't feel cold, I felt warm. I had snow in my mouth and my nose, but I seemed to be able to breathe; I wasn't choking. So I lay there, I guess for 20 minutes. I was buried completely.

What did you think about under the snow?

LAUREN: I thought that I was going to die. I thought everyone else was buried also and that we were all going to die. I was sad. I thought I'm 29 and this is my life ending. I had the classic life-going-before-your-eyes. I thought about my sisters and my parents, all of my good friends, and I just started to get sleepy. I was falling asleep when Rohan found me.

Were you elated to be found?

LAUREN: It's very strange when I think back on it. Being buried under there you would think your reaction would be one of pure terror. And I was so warm, and nothing hurt, and I was very calm. I was sad, but I was very calm, and the minute Rohan found me and started digging me out I just started screaming. I was terrified that now that I had been found I was going to die.

Ron speculates that Toma had hit a hollow spot in the snow after skiing over a lip in the slide, thus triggering the avalanche.

RON: As soon as Toma made that turn he started going down, and there was this big whumph sound, and the whole thing cracked, like 300 feet wide, right where

he was. The last thing I remember was looking over at Lauren and thinking, "I can't believe this; this is not supposed to happen in the Adirondacks." I remember seeing pieces of slab like ice in a river; it was coming towards us in waves. Toma was probably 50 feet above us, and as I was looking up everything started to move at once, and whatever we were standing on broke. It was this huge concussion. It was like the snow coming off a metal roof: It starts slow and starts picking up speed.

I remember looking over at Lauren and reaching toward her, and then I got sucked under the snow; it was like a trap door, and I got dropped straight in. I thought about taking off my skis, I thought about all the stuff you're supposed to do in an avalanche. It reminded me of being in a river, of being in a kayak and getting sucked out of your boat into a big hole and getting bounced and you don't know which way is up. At first I was really terrified, and then I was really calm. I was hitting stuff and bouncing off things, and I thought, "This is it, there's no way I'm going to survive this." I couldn't see anything; I was under the snow. And then I stopped, and I was thinking, "Oh boy, I'm in trouble, I'm buried," and within a second something hit me—there must have been a secondary slough of snow—and

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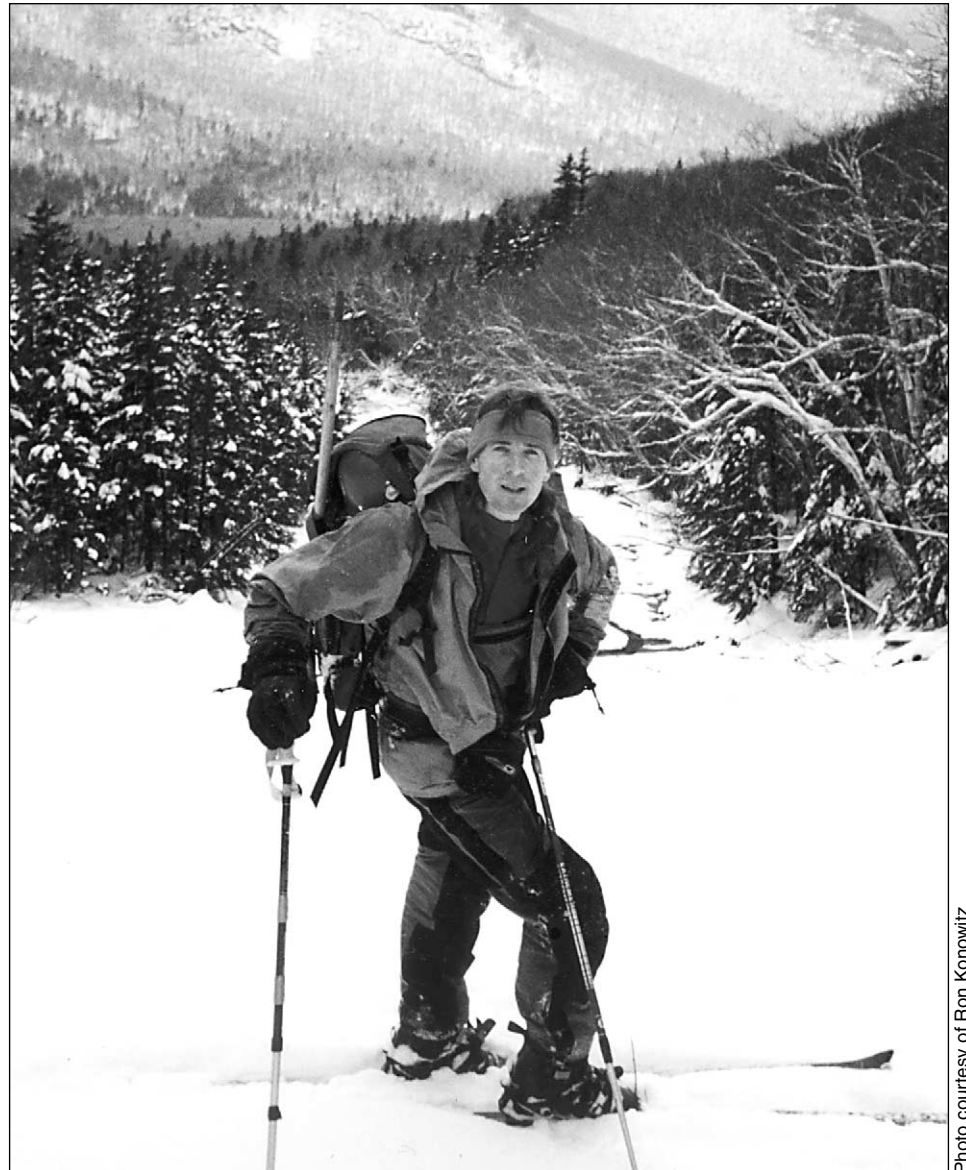


Photo courtesy of Ron Konowitz

Ron Konowitz prepares to ski a new slide on Lower Wolf Jaw in the mid-1990s. He was the first to do so.

pushed me over some kind of lip, and I went over a couple more drops and then all of a sudden I was launched into the air. I was flying through the air sideways, and I was like, "Wow! The sun." I was out of the snow. And I landed on my side. My skis were gone, my pack was gone, my poles were gone, my jacket was all ripped, my clothing was all ripped.

What did you do then?

RON: I looked up, and there was not a drop of snow left on that slide. There was not a sound, and there was nobody, and I thought, "Everybody's dead." I thought that I had lost Lauren. I started screaming for Lauren, for anybody. I saw people down at Marcy Dam, and I yelled down to the dam. I was the only person that didn't break any bones, but my arm was useless. It was just kind of hanging there. My leg hurt, I was banged up all over, I was limping. But I had to find everybody, I had to rescue people. The first person I saw was Rohan. He had been standing right at the

fracture line and watched the whole thing go; he watched all of us disappear. He came skiing down what was left, which was mostly rock and ice. I was dazed and yelling. He said, "Are you OK?" and I said, "Yeah," and we just started looking. We were looking for equipment, we were looking for anything.

Who did you find first?

RON: Rohan and I were scouring places, looking, and all of a sudden we heard this voice that was down in the trees. Russ was pinned against a birch tree with a broken leg, and he had snow up to his waist. Rohan ran down to him and saw that he was OK and just left him, because we had to find the others. It was like triage. There were only two of us searching at that point. Chrissy was still up on the other slide. The avalanche happened so fast that she didn't even see it.

How did you find Lauren?

RON: It was so lucky. Lauren's jacket—she had an anorak on—had got pulled way up, and there was this little piece of red anorak sticking out of the snow in this big mess of trees, and somehow Rohan just saw this piece of red. He took his ski and jammed it down and hit her. And then he got down and dug out her face. I was still up above looking for Toma and looking for Lauren. He shouted, "Lauren's

