

## THE AVALANCHE REVIEW

# OR JUST LUCKY?

Story page 24

# ARE WE GOOD?

On this day on Mount Baker, we plowed up the Coleman Deming Glacier, trudging through unbelievable powder, approximately a foot deep and blower. A short time into our day, the wind gathered force and suddenly we went from t-shirts and sunglasses to goggles and windbreakers. We continued for another 10 minutes hoping the wind would die. This wasn't the case. Conditions worsened with winds increasing to 60 mph. Knowing that moment to turn around or continue based on an uncertain future is always a tricky game. In this case, our decision to continue on, if even for a few minutes, was the wrong one.

*Photo by Jason Hummel, [alpinestateofmind.com](http://alpinestateofmind.com)*

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**Please send submissions to:**

Lynne Wolfe — Editor  
PO Box 1135  
Driggs, Idaho 83422  
tel: (208) 709-4073  
avalanche.review@avalanche.org

**Business and Subscription Office:**

Jaime Musnicki — A3 Executive Director  
PO Box 248  
Victor, ID 83455  
tel: (307) 699-2049  
jaime@avalanche.org

**Advertising:**

Jaime Musnicki  
PO Box 248  
Victor, ID 83455  
tel: (307) 699-2049  
jaime@avalanche.org

**Production:**

McKenzie Long  
PO Box 1776  
Mammoth Lakes, CA 93546  
tel: (513) 515-0723  
mckenzie@cardinalinnovative.com



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## A3 STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The American Avalanche Association promotes and supports professionalism and excellence in avalanche safety, education, and research in the United States.

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**Layout & Design:** McKenzie Long, Cardinal Innovative, (513) 515-0723, [mckenzie@cardinalinnovative.com](mailto:mckenzie@cardinalinnovative.com).

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## CONTRIBUTORS



**Jim Conway** is the owner of Tordrillo North Ski and Snowboard Adventures in Alaska and is the Operations Manager for Cloudveil Mountain Heli in Utah. Jim has 26 years skiing, boarding and guiding experience all over Alaska and parts of Canada. His company Glissemedia provides organizational and graphic solutions for AAI and a number of heli ski operations. Jim is also a AIARE 1 and 2 lead instructor.



**Derek DeBruin** lives in Ogden, Utah where he teaches at Weber State University and owns Bear House Mountain Guiding with his wife. With climbing as his first passion, Derek is always stoked when a day of skiing includes a summit, too. When he's not climbing, skiing, or otherwise on the trail with his wife and son, he's dreaming of his next foray into the local hills or farther afield in the big ranges.



**Joe Stock** is an IFMGA-licensed Mountain Guide based in Anchorage, Alaska. His favorite thing ever is skiing in the Southcentral Alaska mountains with friends, clients and his wife Cathy. He also likes teaching people how to avoid avalanches. [www.stockalpine.com](http://www.stockalpine.com).



**Jake Hutchinson** splits time between Utah where he works for the American Avalanche Institute as a Lead Instructor and West Glacier, Montana forecasting for the GTSR in Glacier National Park. Off seasons find him at Gym Jones or in the desert fixing his motorcycles.



**Liam Bailey** has nearly 20 years of patrol experience and loves skiing and explosives.



**Joe Hill** is native to Southeast Idaho and lives with his wife and son in Rexburg. He is the owner of Sled Shed Board Shop and has been an adjust instructor for the backcountry snowboarding and mountain bike classes at BYU-Idaho. He enjoys playing in the mountains year round to snowboard or splitboard, ride bikes in nearly every discipline imaginable, camp, fish, hike and snowmobile. Joe is also the team director for the Upper Valley Composite NICA mountain bike team.

## FROM THE EDITOR

BY LYNNE WOLFE

**Flashback six years** to January 2012. Fitz and I are drinking shots of bourbon at Trevor Deighton's counter as images of a huge powder cloud and its roar replay over and over in our memories. Those images provide more than enough inspiration to write up my thoughts and lessons in an article called Taylor Musings for TAR 30.4. A few paragraphs from that article sum up the evolution of my thought process at the time:

**Reflections**

On January 24, we were granted a rare opportunity to review our actions in the light of the huge slide that swept the face where we were skiing. On close examination, our tracks were still intact; you can see them on the far looker's right of the face. Did this mean that we made good decisions? Well, we thought so, but we also acknowledged that, in many ways, we got away with it that day.

A quote from Karl Birkeland gave me some perspective:

*Sounds like you guys ended up on the right side of the line. However, it also sounds like you ended up pretty close to the line. My experience is that if you are too close to that line too often, sooner or later you'll end up on the wrong side of the fracture. The older I get—and the more I learn what I don't know—the further I like to be away from that line!*

Sometimes, however, in order to know where that line is, I must turn around and look, saying, "Oho there it is behind me—I have crossed it and now how do I escape this one gracefully?" Taylor Mountain allowed us all to escape

without injuries or casualties, but now we are obligated to put that free ticket to use, to contemplate the lessons of the incident and of this winter of uncertainty.

In the ensuing six years I first revised my question to ask, "did we make good decisions or did we get away with it?" This is a clever sound bite for avalanche classes, but it involves higher self-awareness in order for a person to recognize when they "got away with it." In more recent years I refined it further to ask "where were we most vulnerable?" I am encouraged to hear of many people adapting these questions for greater utility by recreationists and professionals alike.

At WYSAW this year I heard many of the presenters offer their version of post-day or event questions. For example, Knox Williams liked "Git-er done or get away with it?" When I needed a theme for this issue of TAR, debriefing rose naturally to the surface. My aim is to offer backcountry travelers tools for evaluating their days and their systems, with the ideal of incorporating those insights into more effective and streamlined planning processes that are designed to help you make quicker, more accurate, and more efficient decisions. I see this as another iteration of LaChapelle's Ascending Spiral (TAR 24.1), a version of Hegel's Dialectic where thesis and antithesis become synthesis, where we wryly acknowledge our biases and budget for them in the formula for the day, and build on those lessons to turn experience to expertise.

This issue of TAR brings you some great stories from a wide buffet of backcountry travelers: Joe Stock, Joe Hill, Derek DeBruin, Aaron Diamond, and Jake Hutchinson all shine slightly different practitioner lights onto the question of how to critically assess your days and thought

processes. We also have an interesting array of institutional viewpoints: Tom Murphy and Ben Pritchett discuss the birth and evolution of the AIARE debrief questions as part of their decision-making framework, and Colin Zacharias takes it further with his thoughts on debriefing; Liz King presents a NOLS-based perspective on debriefing; and Don Sharaf blends the line between personal and professional as he expands on questions that he explored with us at AAI instructor training in November.

Clarity in communication is a key aspect of effective debriefing; Spencer Storm shares the current version of Valdez Heli-Ski Guides' Operational Communication document, plus some insight and guidelines, while Liam Bailey gives us his quirky and insightful view of how both good and poor operational communication can affect a team's performance.

You'll also find a great tool in the After Action Review (AAR) material on pages 38 to 41, brought to us from John Kanengieter of Zero Point Associates and Todd Henshaw of the Wharton School of Business.

Other useful features include Jason Konigsberg's insight into forecasting for deep persistent slabs, which I've already forwarded to several of my practitioner friends who are trying to operate within the uncertainty that comes with a tricky deep persistent slab problem, and Jim Conway's USAW presentation subsequently became an article about using a Probability/Consequence matrix to determine your desired operational risk profile.

I hope you find some tools in this issue to experiment with as our touchy season progresses. Let me know which ones become most useful for your practice. ▲



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### 36.2 Correction

Apologies for misquoting my friend Molly in 36.2. Here's what she'd like you to remember:

People grieve in so many different ways; ways unimagined and far outside the paradigm of what one might have imagined grief to look or feel like.

—Molly Loomis

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## FROM THE ED

BY JAIME MUSNICKI, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**Happy 2018!** The 2017/18 winter season is ticking along, and even with variable snow conditions around the United States there has been plenty going on in the world of snow and avalanches. Some recent A3 highlights as we approach mid-winter include:

- Executing a special election to complete the final step of the A3 Governing Board restructure, which was supported by membership-approved bylaw changes this past fall.
- Launching the new A3 Pro Training Program this winter in collaboration with the alliance of Pro Course Providers and welcoming our new permanent Pro Training Coordinator, Kate Koons, to the A3 team.
- Fine tuning Avalanche.org and the A3 website, both of which received major facelifts during summer/fall of 2017.
- Recovering (i.e. catching up on office work) from a busy fall of travel and activity with regional avalanche workshops and events.
- Expanding our network of A3 supporters—individuals and companies—who generously help fund our programs and initiatives.
- Distributing SWAGs, *Snowy Torrents*, and TARs to inquiring minds around the United States and the world.
- Funding three new avalanche researchers and their projects this season through the A3 graduate and practitioner research grant programs.

The work of A3 is inspired by and strives to directly support avalanche professionals (patrollers, guides, forecasters, researchers, SAR personnel, educators) and the people who benefit from the work of avalanche professionals (resort skiers/riders, winter backcountry skiers/riders/climbers/snowshoers/adventurers, mountain communities, snowy mountainous highway drivers, etc) in the United States. We're proud of the progress we've made in recent years to further advance our mission of professional excellence in avalanche safety, education, and research in the United States. The support and engagement of A3 members and friends has been integral to this progress—thank you. At the same time, we recognize there is more to do (always), and we will continue to envision, strategize, and execute on our mission and better connect our avalanche community in 2018.

May your winter continue well, wherever you may be. Thank you for being a part of the A3 and broader avalanche community! ▲

## A3 GOVERNING BOARD TRANSITIONS

**The A3 Governing Board** is pleased to welcome Pete Woodring of Sun Valley, ID, as the new A3 Treasurer. Pete Woodring is a founding partner of Cypress Partners, a wealth management firm devoted to helping individuals and families with comprehensive planning and capital preservation and growth strategies. He started in the business in the late 90s with U.S. Trust Company after playing soccer at the top level in Germany, Denmark, and the U.S. Pete has always had an adventurous spirit and moved to Sun Valley from the Bay Area in 2015 to enjoy the mountain life with his family.

Pete is an outdoor enthusiast and enjoys all of the mountain recreation that Sun Valley has to offer. Pete's energy and athletic past allow him to quickly adapt to some of the new mountain sports he enjoys, such as kayaking and ski touring. As an accomplished skier, coupled with his drive to train and climb mountains, ski touring is at the top of his mountain adventure list. A father of three, Pete is acutely aware of the risks of his newfound passion, and has a keen interest in becoming more knowledgeable about the science of avalanches and the safety of touring. Pete has an enormous appreciation and respect for the great outdoors and an immense appetite for adventure. He is eager to continue to learn more about his new high-altitude surroundings, so that he can be a safe and knowledgeable participant in the many high country activities he enjoys.

Pete is the first new A3 Trustee to join the organization following the Board restructure this past fall. He was appointed by a unanimous vote of the A3 Board in mid-November and participated in his first A3 Board meeting on December 1st. A3 is excited to have Pete join the A3 Board and looks forward to benefiting from his diverse professional experience, his passion for snowy mountain pursuits, and his awareness of the importance of the work of avalanche professionals.

**Many Thanks to Outgoing Trustees**

As the A3 Board transitions to its new structure, we also want to recognize and thank the individuals who have recently moved on from A3 Governing Board service. Some of these people stepped off of the Board within the last couple years, while others are moving on as part of the Board restructure transition.

A3 would not be the organization it is today without the hard work of these individuals (and the countless others who came before them over the last 30-plus years). Serving on any board is a commitment of personal time and resources. For many years these people brought passion, intellect, insight, experience, and resources to the table for A3. We appreciate and are incredibly grateful for the experience, skills, and connections in the avalanche industry that these individuals have contributed over the years to move the organization forward. Thank you!

Nick Armitage—outgoing SAR Co-Chair  
Kirk Bachman—former Education Chair  
Ned Bair—outgoing Research Chair  
Andy Dietrick—outgoing Alaska Section Rep  
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Scott Savage—former Secretary  
Mike Schneider—outgoing Rockies Section Rep  
Stuart Thompson—outgoing Membership Chair  
Gene Urie—outgoing Sierra Section Rep  
Bill Williamson—outgoing Ski Area Rep

While some of these folks are focusing their energy in new directions, others will continue to engage and serve A3 in various non-Trustee capacities, including as committee members and advisors to the organization. Regardless, A3 Board and Staff express huge heartfelt thanks to all of these dedicated outgoing Trustees. Next time you see one of these folks around town or out in snowy mountains, remember to thank them for their A3 service! ▲

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970-482-4279



For more info:  
David Sly, 250 744 8765  
davidgsly@mapleleafpowder.com  
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## A3 PRO TRAINING COORDINATOR

We are pleased to welcome **Kate Koons** as our new A3 Pro Training Coordinator! Kate grew up in the great state of NJ where she learned the importance of sharp edges and how to bump her sister off of the Poma lift. For 23 years, Kate has worked as an educator, guide and program manager all over the world. For the last 17 years, Kate has worked for NOLS, leading expeditions and managing the winter program in the Teton Valley of Idaho. Other travels and work have taken her to the Himalaya, a place she considers to be her second home. She has also worked for the US Antarctic Program training and supporting scientists at remote field camps across the frozen continent. Currently, Kate ski guides in the Tetons, teaches risk management trainings and still works the occasional NOLS field course. She can be found at home in Victor, ID with her husband and two energetic fur children running, biking, skiing and gardening.

Kate brings a wealth of professional skills and experience to the Pro Training Coordinator position, including:

- depth of experience as an avalanche professional
- an easy-going, personable manner that enables her to listen and connect with varied people and weather adversity/challenges
- a strong background of program management experience
- familiarity with the A3 Pro Training Program
- a clear understanding of the need to build relationships, listen to providers and other stakeholders, and continue to foster a culture of collaboration
- a proven record of success in office-based positions
- strong recommendations from numerous current and former employers about her work ethic, communication skills, leadership, and team-oriented approach

We are excited to bring Kate onto the A3 team in this role. You can reach Kate at [kate@avalanche.org](mailto:kate@avalanche.org) or [a3protraining@avalanche.org](mailto:a3protraining@avalanche.org).



## FROM KATE KOONS AND THE PROFESSIONAL TRAINER PROGRAM

**Greetings from the** Pro Training Program! February is upon us and we are full steam ahead with Pro courses being offered by six Course Providers. This is an exciting time for A3, along with the Pro Course Provider Alliance, to be moving forward with a program that has been four years in the making. I am working closely with Course Providers to help support their program as well as gather information, feedback and data to inform refinements we will make in the spring. I am also here to answer general questions about the Pro Training Program.

A common question A3 has been receiving over the last few months is, “what do I do if I currently hold a Level 3 from years past?” This is a great question. When creating the Professional program, a big priority to all involved was not to alienate people who have been working as professionals for years. If you currently have a Level 3 or AVPro certification, you are considered to hold a Pro 2 within the new guidelines. You do not need to do anything as the industry recognizes this equivalency and there is no mandate to hold a “certification.” If you would like or need a recognized equivalency document for the Pro 2, A3 can provide this for you. In most cases, if you do not hold the higher level of training from before 2017, you will need to take a Pro level course. We realize that this change is a big deal for many within the industry.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have. Until then, pray for snow, we all need it! ▲

I was obsessed with Wonder Woman, and she was at the mall (I grew up in Jersey so the mall was a regular part of life) and I could not wait to sit on her lap. My Mom told me that Wonder Woman was only on TV from 75-79, but the re-runs were my favorite. She was my hero!