

WSL Institute for Snow and Avalanche Research

Avalanche accident(s) on Drümännler, 3 January 2010

On Sunday, January 03rd 2010, at 11:25 am, 8 backcountry skiers climbed along an existing track up to the Drümännler in the rear Diemtigtal Valley (Canton Berne). Two of the skiers, the second and third in the line of climbing skiers, were caught by a slab avalanche¹ and swept away. One of them was completely buried in the path of the released snow masses.

Members of the affected ski group, together with other backcountry ski tourers, immediately took up the search for the buried man with the help of avalanche transceivers. Others alarmed the rescue forces.

The backcountry ski tourer was quickly located beneath the snow masses and dug out. In the very moment when the doctor from Swiss Air-Rescue (Rega) assumed the medical supervision of the rescued man, a second avalanche² was released in a large adjacent bowl with open western exposition which completely buried a total of twelve people, including the doctor.

At nearly the same moment when the second avalanche was released, at a point about 250 meters southwest of the accident location, a third avalanche³ was triggered. This avalanche was released by two backcountry skiers in the course of their ascent.

The cause of the second avalanche is still unknown. It is possible that it was naturally triggered or remotely triggered.

In the course of Sunday, January 3rd, eight injured persons were be rescued from the debris of the two avalanches and flown to regional hospitals. One person who was excavated was already dead. In the course of the following hours, three of the seriously injured persons, including the doctor, died. On Sunday, as darkness fell, the search operations* had to be broken off for safety reasons.

Due to poor visibility and weather conditions, a further search was resumed only on Tuesday, January 5th. With the help of a Recco detector, all three of the missing persons were swiftly located and being dug out of the snow (dead). Thus, this avalanche accident on the Drümännler took a total of seven human lives.

This is a brief summary of information which was made available to the SLF on January 27th.
Davos, January 27th 2010

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¹ Avalanche 1: exposition: SW, breadth: appx. 40-70 m, length: appx. 220 m, fracture depth: appx. 40 cm, gradient 35-40 degrees.

² Avalanche 2: exposition: NW, breadth: appx. 100 m, length: appx. 330 m, fracture depth: appx. 40-70 cm, gradient: 35-40 degrees.

³ Avalanche 3: exposition: NW, breadth: appx. 80 m, length: ca. 210 m (parts of it are longer), fracture depth: appx. 60 cm, gradient: 30-35 degrees.

* The main problem for the search have been the deactivated transceivers after first avalanche.



Photo 1: Situation on 3 January immediately after the initiation of the wide ranging rescue operations (photo: J. Däppen, Bern)



Photo 2: Overview photo from 5 February 2010 with the three triggered avalanches. At photo center, the Bodezehore, 2,354 m altitude. The summit of the Drümännler is located further to the left. (Photo: J. Schweizer)