



canadianavalanchecentre

RAC News

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Photo by Jordy Shepard

Upcoming Events / CAC Information

Avalanche Awareness Days and RAC

Avalanche Awareness Days were very successful this year and we are learning more and more about the close relationship between AAD and RAC. At our national event at Big White and at ski resorts and snowmobile clubs around BC and Alberta we had a variety of on hill events including mock rescues and dog searches as well as snowpit demos and beacon searches. This year at Big White we teamed up with AdventureSmart to conduct a Snow Safety Education Program to the school at Big White for grades 4-6. Dave Naron, AdventureSmart Ambassador, and Justin Trudeau, Director of the Canadian Avalanche Foundation, helped lead the kids through the Alpine Code of Responsibility and other snow safety topics.

For participation in the Big White activities we forward a very special thanks to Matt Atton for organizing and executing several on hill demonstrations. Matt is a RAC provider. From the CAC information booth, we helped him fill several of his RAC courses by placing his signup sheets at our table. Plus he made himself available to everyone who inquired about RAC courses.

Some venues that stated that even though their on hill demo's were not well attended (because the skiing was so good that weekend), just presence of the Avalanche Awareness Days event at their local ski hill prompted people to think about their safety and sign up for RAC courses. RAC instructors that were keenly involved in Avalanche Awareness Days at the participating venues found the event a great avenue to promote their classes. **We want to continue with this movement by specifically promoting RAC as our theme for next year's Avalanche Awareness Days.**

Other venues like Mount Washington, Fernie Alpine Resort, Banff Centre and Kicking Horse Mountain Resort also raised money for the CAC through donations and auctions.

Canadian Avalanche Foundation Fundraiser Event

The CAF will be hosting a Benefit Dinner and Silent Auction in these locations:

- Friday, February 24th in Vancouver
- Saturday, February 25th in Calgary

The events will be co-hosted by Chris Stethem and Justin Trudeau. The special guest speaker will be Laurie Skreslet, the first Canadian to summit Mt Everest. Laurie's presentation entitled "The Nature of Risk" will be about the inseparable nature of adventure and risk. Tickets are \$150 per person and are supported by a \$75 tax receipt. Please go to the CAF website to complete the



Ticket Order Form:

http://www.avalanchefoundation.ca/Temp/06_fundraisers.htm

The CAF is a federally registered charity formed to raise money in support of public avalanche safety initiatives, education and research.

Schwag from MEC

In case you missed the announcement in the last issue, we have some schwag from MEC for RAC. The CAC has developed a brief student survey for your RAC class attendees. This survey does not make any inquiries about the instructor or method of instruction. It does collect demographic data and the backcountry habits of the RAC students. The first 100 RAC providers who send in completed surveys will receive a MEC jacket with our embroidered logo. So far we have only received surveys back from a minority of the RAC providers so there is still time to claim your jacket by getting your surveys in. The surveys are sent out with every RAC order. You can also download it from: <http://avalancheinfo.net/RACimages/survey.pdf> or you can email programservices@avalanche.ca and we will email the survey to you.

We encourage you to read through the surveys prior to sending them back to us. There is information that could be useful to you such as finding out whether they intend on taking an ARAC course or how they found out about your course.

The surveys we have received thus far are enough of a random sampling to extract some preliminary findings.

- 61% of respondents are taking the RAC course for personal safety.
- 49% check the public avalanche bulletins most times when they plan their winter recreation. 36% indicated they just learned of the public avalanche bulletins (from taking the RAC course). 68% said the RAC course helped them better understand the public avalanche forecasts.
- Most students found out about their RAC course through friends so word of mouth is currently how most RAC courses are filled. Others found out about it through their local ski hill.
- 74% indicated that they will be taking another course; most said they are planning to take an ARAC course. A smaller percentage planned on going on to the Ski Operations Level I.
- 50% spend 1-10 days skiing/boarding out of bounds; 19% spend 11-20 days skiing/boarding out of bounds. 57% spend 1-10 days skiing/boarding in the backcountry and 19% spend 11-20 days skiing/boarding in the backcountry. There was not enough of a random sample to show the numbers for snowmobiling.

If you want more information on the survey results, please feel free to call Jennifer George at 250-837-2435 anytime.

Amateur Decision Making Tool Prototype

The first stage in testing new decision making tools from the ADFAR project is underway. The first phase of the "Avaluator" is a new decision support tool for assessing avalanche risk that is aimed at recreationists that are starting their backcountry career.



ADFAR tried to look at backcountry user education comprehensively and grouped them into four levels of avalanche related expertise:

- Unaware
- Aware, but untrained recreationist
- Trained recreationist
- Professional

Last winter, CAC and Parks Canada introduced the backcountry avalanche advisory to provide appropriate guidance for the “Unaware” group. This icon and basic travel guidance system assists “Unaware” users to make informed choices about backcountry travel at home during trip planning. Since users at this experience level do not have the necessary knowledge and skill to personally assess the situation, they are completely dependent on the guidance from avalanche experts.

The first phase of the “Avaluator” targets the “Aware, but untrained recreationist” user group. This tool helps the user at this experience level to make appropriate choices during the trip planning stage by providing a risk framework to combine the CAC/Parks Avalanche Danger Ratings with different terrain types defined by the Parks Canada Avalanche Terrain Exposure Scale (ATES). To assist users in assessing avalanche risk at the slope scale, the “Avaluator” provides the recreationist with a list of Obvious Clues (McCammon & Haegeli, 2005) to recognize situations that have resulted in avalanche accidents and involvements in the past. The list of Obvious Clues includes:

- Avalanches: in the area within the last 48 hours
- Loading: By snow, wind or rain within the last 48 hours
- Path: Identifiable by a novice
- Terrain Trap: Gullies, trees, cliffs or other features that increase the severity of being caught
- Rating: Considerable or higher hazard on the current avalanche bulletin
- Unstable Snow: Collapsing, cracking, hollow snow or other clear evidence of instability,
- Thaw Instability: Recent warming of the snow surface due to sun, rain or warm air.

The second phase of the “Avaluator” will target the “Trained Recreationist”. This tool will be based on the same risk framework, but it will also incorporate more advanced methods for assessing local avalanche danger and terrain in more detail.

The ADFAR team is hoping to test the first prototype of the “Avaluator” during the rest of the winter. The goal is to find out whether the proposed tools actually work for amateur recreationists. Of course we can only do this test in a controlled environment, such as a recreational avalanche course. Therefore, we are dependent on the participation of interested RAC providers. **If you are interested in participating in this test and significantly contributing to the future design of the Avaluator, please contact Pascal Haegeli directly at pascal@avisualanche.ca before February 21st.**

Footnote: the majority of this article's text was derived from “*Decision Framework and Tool Design Working Paper*” prepared by Pascal Haegeli, PhD, Avisualanche Consulting for ADFAR.

CAC RAC Initiatives

RAC promotion, New CD Available, DVD technical issues

What the CAC Does to Promote RAC – Behind the Scenes

This is the busiest season in recent history for RAC. By mid-January we already had as many sales in RAC materials as we had for all of last year – a good indication that more RAC courses than ever will be delivered. We are hopeful that some of this increase is due to the integration of the RAC program into the core programs of the Canadian Avalanche Centre. This is a brief update to let you know about some of the things the CAC team is actively doing to help increase the number of RAC course deliveries.

CAC forecasters interact on a weekly basis with media in Western Canada. As part of our communication strategy all public communication from CAC staff includes three key messages: get your RAC, get the gear and get the bulletin. CAC forecasters have given over 75 interviews on radio, TV and in print since November. At the majority of these the RAC program is explained, as well as how to use avalanche.ca to find a provider in any given area.

Another way that we are actively promoting the RAC program is through direct CAC outreach activities. At the Edmonton and Calgary snowmobile shows, at the Banff Film Festival, at Avalanche Awareness days and any other events where the CAC is present as an exhibitor promoting RAC is one of the main goals of the CAC representatives. For any of these events all RAC providers are invited to provide sign-up sheets and promotional materials for their courses and we will do our best to interest people in signing up. At Big White's Avalanche Awareness Days the CAC booth at the tradeshow filled six RAC classes in two days.

Last but not least, it is critically important that we all remember that a stable partnership with Mountain Equipment Co-op to support RAC programs is crucial. MEC supports RAC programs with \$12500 of direct funding and this year has donated over \$6000 of in-kind support (get your surveys in – the fleeces are here!). Both the CAC and MEC are working hard to enhance our already excellent relationship.

New RAC CD Available

A new CD for RAC is now available for purchase. From the University of Calgary ASARC, Bruce Jamieson and Alec van Herwinjen's highlight the significance of pops and drops in this new CD titled "Fracture Character in Compression Tests". The purchase price is \$10.00. It will also be available to the public on our on-line store so your RAC students can purchase a copy of their own.

This CD contains two PowerPoint presentations which introduce the concepts of Fracture Character in compression tests. A five level classification system is described and several videos clarify the classification system. This CD contains both Mac and PC versions of PowerPoint shows for the advanced (*Advanced Presentation.pps*) and the basic (*Basic Presentation.pps*) presentations as well as several movies on the different fracture characters (**.avi and *.mov*). We recommend reading the ReadMe First file on the CD and going through both presentations and their associated presentation notes well before you are scheduled for a class presentation.



RAC DVD Technical Issues

The Bruce Tremper "*Know Before You Go*" and the "*Avalanche Awareness*" DVD's are cut using the slowest possible burn rate. However, we cannot guarantee compatibility with every DVD player. I have personally tested these DVD's at home. In many cases one works great on my laptop and then skips or does not run at all on my home DVD player. If you get a copy that does not work in your particular DVD player, try it in another DVD player or we will be happy to issue you a refund or send you another copy to try.

Please send feedback to:

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