Mountain School Tech Tips:
Report on Canadian Avalanche Association Spring Workshop

Each year, in May, the Canadian Avalanche Association (CAA) holds their annual general meeting and spring workshop. The final two days of this week long event feature guest speakers and are open free of charge to the general public. If you can make it to Penticton (where the AGM is held) in May, you can avail yourself of some terrific current avalanche education for free!

This years conference covered a whole range of topics from an analysis of the propagation saw test and the extended column test, to skier stress under snowpack warming, right through to a detailed analysis of this years snowpack and associated avalanche accidents and fatalities.

The most important concepts to come out of the conference with relevance to backcountry recreationalists are:

1. It's all about terrain ... terrain, terrain, terrain. Avalanche accidents and fatalities this year showed a common theme, poor use and choice of terrain. Backcountry recreationalists could increase their safety margins by choosing and using terrain more wisely. This includes such seemingly obvious tenets as:
   - Measuring slope angle and choosing slopes under 30 degrees;
   - Choosing slope aspect more carefully, e.g. avoiding south aspects on first warm up of the season, or north and east aspects after wind events (assuming prevailing SW wind loading);
   - Avoiding thin snowpack areas, analysis of this years incidents indicated that many were triggered from thin snowpack areas;
   - Not switchbacking up under large avalanche slopes or regrouping under steep slopes or avalanche slopes, yep, a surprising number of incidents involved recreationalists choosing, what would appear to be, obviously dangerous terrain for their uptrack.
   - Choosing safe locations to dig snowpits.
2. Recognizing the importance of whumpfs, and acting appropriately.
3. Practice, practice, practice with your avalanche beacon. In one fatality avalanche, the survivor was unable to pinpoint the location of the buried victim.
4. Both the extended column test and the propagation saw test have the potential to improve evaluation of snowpack stability, look for more information on these two tests coming in the near future.

If anyone is interested in a full summary of this years conference, email me at dog_house@shaw.ca and I'll send you my full notes.