

Massive snow means lots of work for ski patrollers

By Julie Brown, Powder

The morning after a February storm had shut down the ski resort for two days, the Sun Valley ski patrol started yet another day of work to open the mountain to the public.

The meeting started with announcements: race schedules, grooming reports, mountain closures, fallen trees from the storm. Then came the weather and avalanche mitigation report: Eight days, 60 inches of snow, quite a bit of wind, and one hell of a storm cycle.

This winter has already set records for Sun Valley, currently standing at the fourth largest snowpack since 1968. The ski area is currently 181 percent of average for snowfall in the month of February, which means ski patrol has been logging a lot of overtime.

Sun Valley is not alone. California dominated headlines all of January with an incessant pounding, leaving Mammoth Mountain with 430 inches of snowfall so far.

Most, or virtually all, ski patrol teams in the country have decades of combined experience, if not more, and the work routines and safety protocols are well reinforced. But their job is still one of risk. Last month, a Squaw Valley ski patroller died while conducting avalanche control at the top of a ridge inbounds.

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