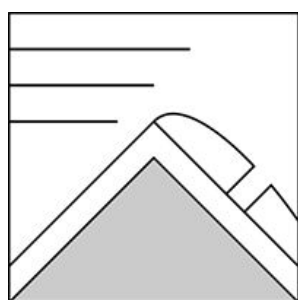


The Bottom Line

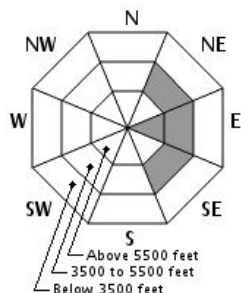
It is possible for a skier or climber to trigger an avalanche today in wind loaded terrain. Natural avalanches are unlikely, but consider the increased power from the sun as spring approaches. Wind slabs on steep slopes with a southerly aspect can weaken subtly as winds diminish and temperatures warm. Wind slabs exist primarily on slopes with a degree of easterly aspect at mid-elevations, including some terrain and micro-features on the west side of the range. A **MODERATE** rating is given to today's avalanche problem due to the possibility of human-triggering combined with the potential size of an avalanche. The exception to this is the Northern Gullies in Huntington which have **LOW** avalanche danger. Careful terrain selection that combines terrain management with the human factor (within your party and others) will improve your odds for a safe day in avalanche terrain today.

Mountain Weather

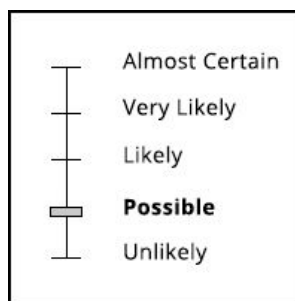
Friday was a great winter day for those who took advantage of it. Temperatures moderated to around 10F with W and WNW wind in the 40-55 mph range. Clear skies allowed great visibility and the blowing snow that contributes to our wind slab problem could be seen at times streaming down from our alpine fetch. High pressure cresting over the region today will continue this trend with temperatures on the summit reaching into the teens F, skies remaining clear, and wind decreasing from the current NW 60 mph to 15-30 mph by the end of the day.

Primary Avalanche Problem


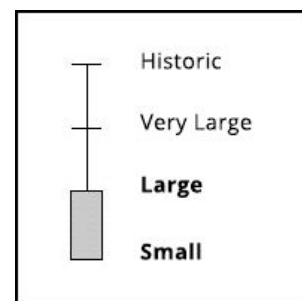
Wind Slab



Aspect/Elevation



Likelihood



Size

Wind slab is prevalent on easterly aspects at mid-elevations. The structure is fairly simple: firm slab that is 5-15" thick over a thin layer of much softer snow acting as the weak layer, with a variety of smooth bed surfaces underneath. Shooting cracks and whumphing have been absent for the past several days, but tests are producing fairly clean shears with some indicating the ability to propagate a crack. While ambient air temperatures will stay below freezing today, clear skies will allow ample solar radiation as the day progresses. Steep slopes that have a degree of southerly aspect will likely see warming effects today. This red flag is hard to gauge the impact of and has produced some strange avalanches. The best way to treat the first real warming of a wind slab like we will see this afternoon on slopes such as The Lip and Sluice is to give them a wide berth of respect, minimizing any time you choose to spend on or beneath them.

Snowpack and Avalanche Discussion

Hard bed surfaces that range from ultra-firm wind slab to melt-freeze crusts are exposed in places that wind has been able to scour. While edgeable, the widespread distribution of some sort of firm layer makes bringing your crampons today a no brainer. This is also providing the bed surface for our avalanche problem. Skiers and climbers yesterday found that the wind slab was in places supportable while booting, but more often punching through. With skis on, this wind slab offered decent skiing, but where the slab was thinner, it was described as *punchy*. In addition to providing more challenging skiing, these thin areas also proved more capable of producing an avalanche as one skier found in Right Gully.

Helon Hoffer, Snow Ranger

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Please Remember: Safe travel in avalanche terrain requires training and experience. This forecast is just one of many decision making tools. You control your own risk by choosing where, when, and how you travel. Understand that the avalanche danger may change when actual weather differs from the weather forecast. For more information contact the Forest Service Snow Rangers, the AMC at the Pinkham Notch Visitor Center, or the caretakers at Hermit Lake Shelters or at the Harvard Cabin.