Still Weak and We Turned Around

Date
Mon, 02/12/2024 - 11:20
Activity
Skiing

We rode into the Throne today in the Northern Bridgers. Our objective was to get to the top of the throne this time and to see what the warm-up in early February did. We felt that without signs of instability and good travel practices, this was an appropriate goal with wind-loaded terrain being off the table. At the bottom of the Throne, we discussed that if we saw signs of instability such as cracking and collapsing it was time to turn around. About halfway up on an east-facing slope at 8000' we dug a snowpit to test for instabilities. What we found is that the warm-up didn't change much, and found dry faceted snow below a stout crust that did form. Stability tests were reasonable with a score of ECTN 21 and we felt comfortable continuing to the ridgeline above. On the backside of the ridge, we were able to easily trigger small avalanches (1-2" deep) in the new snow. While walking on the ridge we felt a large collapse and saw shooting cracks behind, below, and above us. This made us both jump a bit and was an obvious sign that it was time to turn around. We pulled the plug once again and began skiing down, but not before kicking off a few more loose snow avalanches on the north side of the ridge.

Here's what we took away from this. First, the snowpack is still very weak and it will take more than just a short warm-up to improve stability. Second, areas where new snow has drifted into thicker slabs are concerning, and triggering an avalanche is likely. Third, new snow is bonding poorly to the old snow surface and as snow continues this new snow will be sensitive to human triggers.

Region
Bridger Range
Location (from list)
The Throne
Observer Name
Zach Peterson