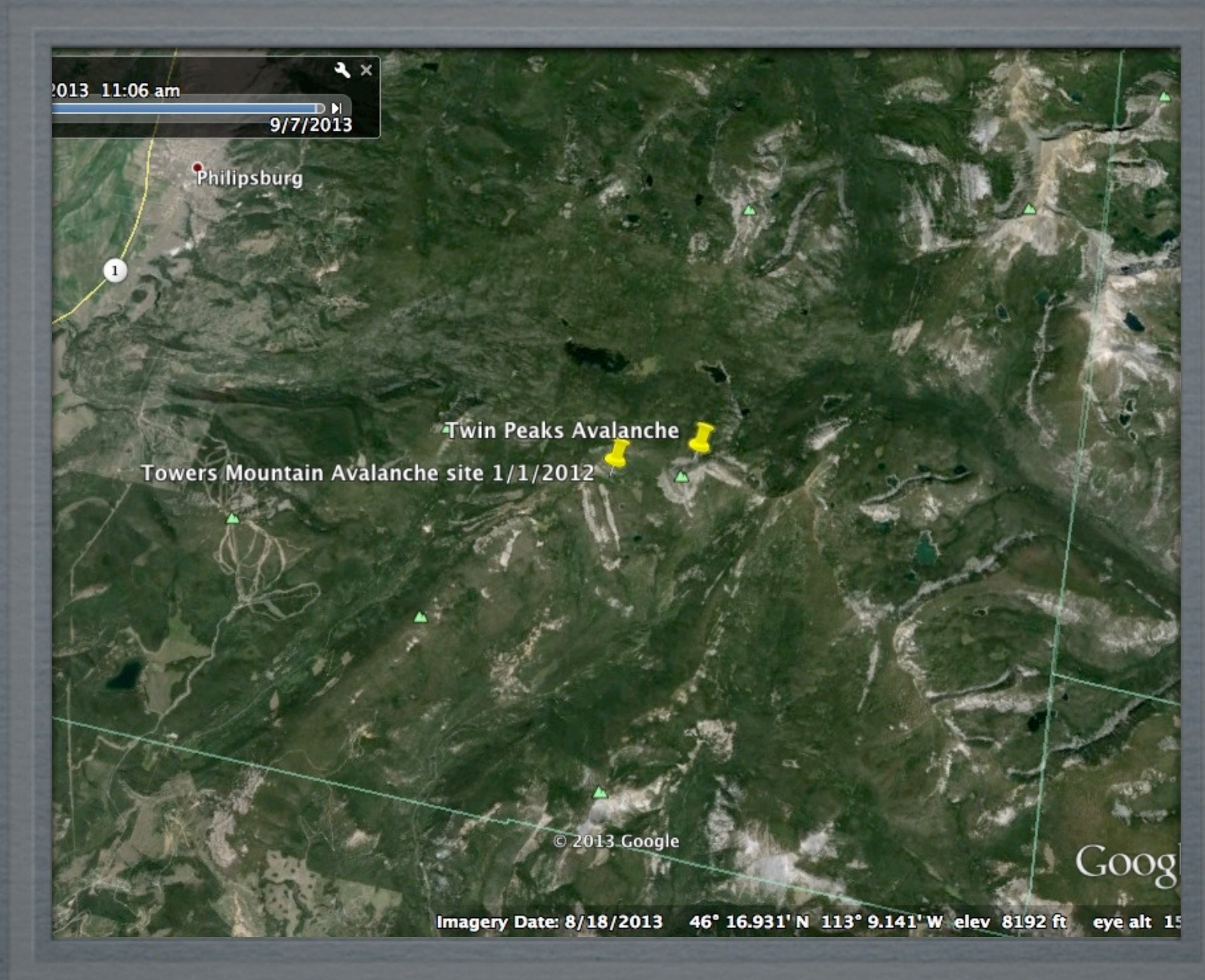




Avalanche Incident on Twin Peaks Flint Creek Range December 24, 2013

ON DECEMBER 24, 2013, A GROUP OF SNOWMOBILERS WERE RIDING IN FAMILIAR TERRAIN IN THE FLINT CREEK RANGE 8 MILES SOUTHEAST OF PHILLIPSBURG, MT. THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION AND PHOTOS ARE FROM KEITH ANTONIOLI WHO WANTS TO SHARE HIS EXPERIENCE SO THAT OTHERS MAY LEARN FROM WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM.



THIS AREA IS LOCALLY KNOWN AS RED LION AND IS POPULAR WITH BACKCOUNTRY SNOWMOBILERS AND SKIERS. A NUMBER OF AVALANCHE ACCIDENTS HAVE OCCURRED IN THIS AREA THE PAST FEW YEARS. ON NEW YEARS DAY 2012, A SNOWMOBILER DIED IN AN AVALANCHE ON TOWERS MOUNTAIN 1 MILE WEST OF THIS INCIDENT AND IN 2001, A RIDER DIED IN AN AVALANCHE IN THE SAME AREA. THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS ARE VERBATIM FROM KEITH'S ACCOUNT OF THE INCIDENT.



“I WAS CLIMBING A LINE BETWEEN THE TREES THAT I’VE CLIMBED A HUNDRED TIMES. I’LL ADMIT THAT I KNEW THE SNOW CONDITIONS WERE BAD FOR HILL CLIMBING AS I DO PAY ATTENTION TO SNOW REPORTS, BUT FOR SOME REASON IT DIDN’T EVEN CROSS MY MIND THAT THE HILL COULD SLIDE”.

“THERE WERE NO SIGNS/NOISES OR OTHER INDICATIONS OF INSTABILITY. THERE WAS MAYBE A FEW INCHES OF FRESH, AND IF I HAD TO DESCRIBE THE SNOW CONSISTENCY THE FIRST WORD THAT COMES TO MIND WOULD BE "DENSE" OR "HEAVY". IT SORT OF REMINDED ME OF A MUD SLIDE”.



“AS I STARTED GETTING INTO THE TREE LINE THE SNOW BECAME A LOT SOFTER/DEEPER AND I LOST MY MOMENTUM AND WAS GOING TO HAVE TO TURN OUT. I WENT TO TURN OUT AND WAS ALMOST POINTED BACK DOWNHILL WHEN I GOT STUCK. I BEGAN TO ROCK MY SLED A LITTLE WHEN I NOTICED THAT THE SNOW HAD BROKE FREE ABOUT 50 FEET BELOW ME AND ABOUT 50 FEET TO THE SIDE”.



“AT THIS POINT I TURNED AND LOOKED UP AND NOTICED THAT THE ENTIRE HILL HAD BROKEN AND WAS BARRELING DOWN AT ME. BEFORE I COULD DO ANYTHING IT HIT ME AND THREW ME DOWN BELOW MY SLED ONTO MY STOMACH AND THEN SWALLOWED ME UP. AT ONE POINT I WAS COMPLETELY UNDER AS THE MAJORITY OF THE SLIDE WENT OVER THE TOP OF ME BUT I ENDED UP BACK AT THE TAIL AND SOON WAS JUST KIND OF BEING ROLLED ALONG. IT RAN ME OFF OF ONE TREE AND BRUISED MY LEG REALLY BAD BUT OTHER THAN THAT NO INJUIRES. AS IT CAME TO A STOP I ENDED UP ABOUT 80% BURIED ON MY LEFT SIDE WITH MY HEAD POINTED DOWN HILL AND MY RIGHT ARM FREE. MY FACE WAS SLIGHTLY BURIED BUT I COULD SEE DAYLIGHT AND BREATH FINE”.

“AS SOON AS EVERYTHING CAME TO A STOP, I COULD HEAR SLEDS FIRE UP. MY ARM WAS ABOVE THE SNOW AND I WAS WAVING IT SO IT WOULD BE EASY TO SEE. I WOULD SAY MY FRIENDS HAD ME OUT IN ABOUT 5 MINUTES. MY SLED WAS ALMOST COMPLETELY BURIED AND ONLY THE SKI LOOP WAS SHOWING”.

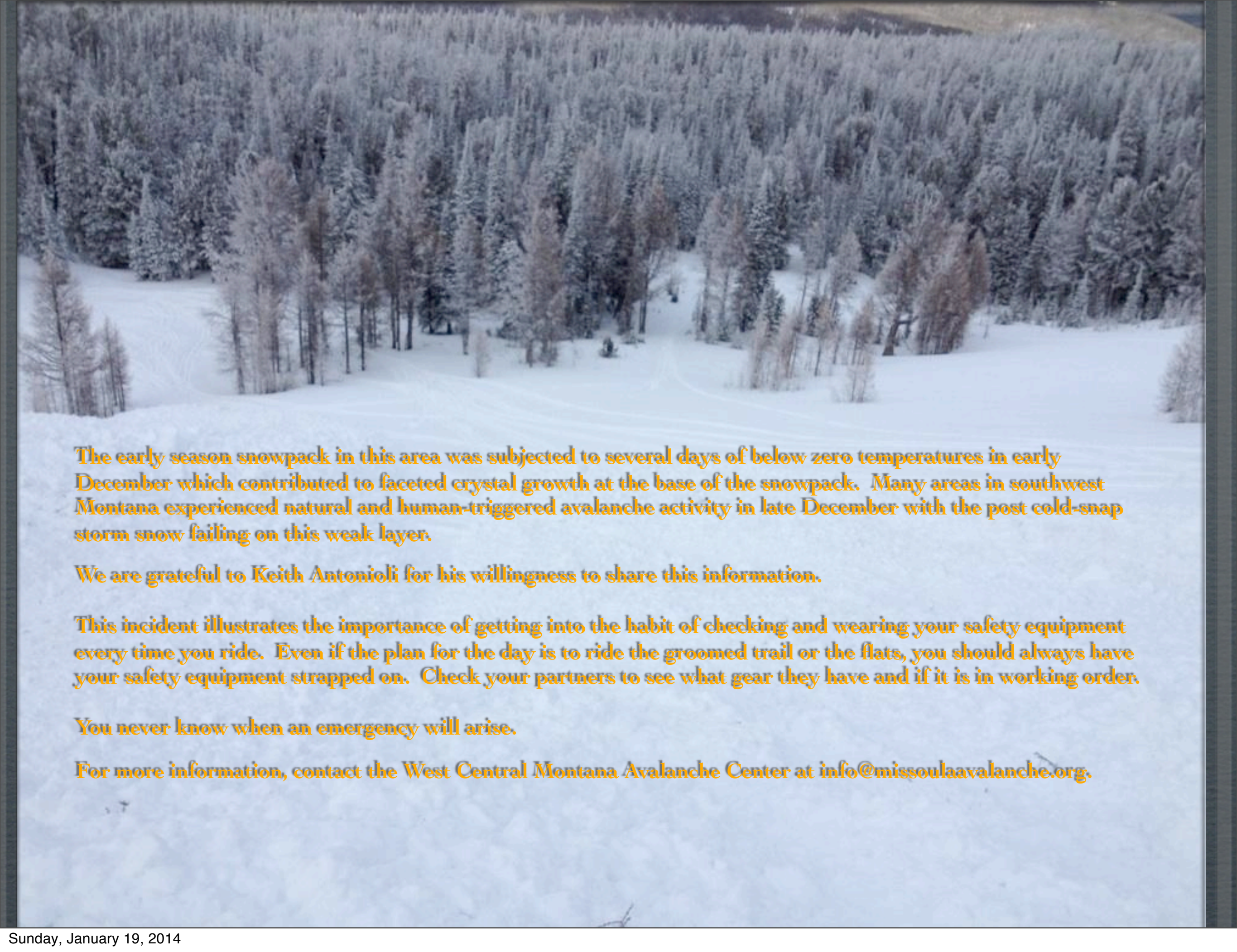


“I WAS THE ONLY ONE IN MY GROUP WITH ANY GEAR. I ALWAYS CARRY MY BEACON, SHOVEL/PROBE AND ABS. MY FRIENDS HAVE BEACONS/SHOVELS/PROBES, BUT WE HAD AGREED THAT WE WOULD JUST RIDE THE ROADS SINCE NO ONE ELSE HAD THEIR GEAR”.

“I DEFINITELY BROKE THE RULES OF THE RIDE! I'VE HAD A FEW AVALANCHE CLASSES BUT ITS BEEN A NUMBER OF YEARS. I DON'T THINK ANYONE IN MY PARTY EVER HAS”.



“LOOKING BACK I OF COURSE WOULDN'T HAVE TRIED WHAT I DID IN THE FIRST PLACE BUT FROM NOW ON I WILL ALWAYS CONSIDER THAT A HILL CAN SLIDE. THIS I THINK GETS ONE IN THE RIGHT MIND SET TO USE WHAT THEY HAVE AT THEIR DISPOSAL. FOR EXAMPLE, MY ABS HANDLE WAS OUT, BUT I HAD COMPLETELY FORGOT ABOUT IT. THE HILL CUTTING LOOSE WAS A COMPLETE SURPRISE”.

A photograph of a snowy mountain landscape. The foreground is a smooth, snow-covered slope. In the middle ground, there are several evergreen trees heavily laden with snow. The background shows a dense forest of similar trees extending up the mountain. The overall scene is a winter wonderland.

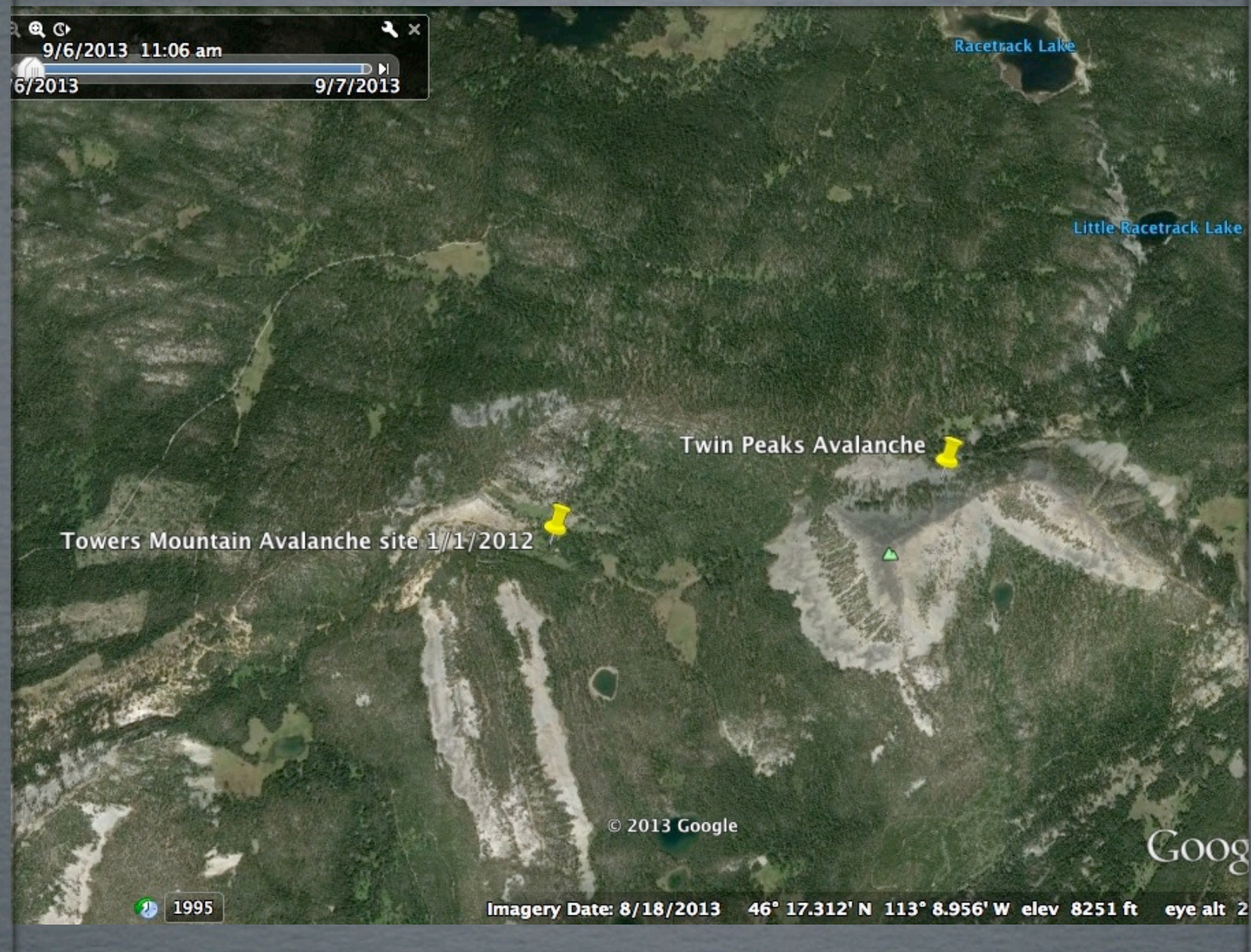
The early season snowpack in this area was subjected to several days of below zero temperatures in early December which contributed to faceted crystal growth at the base of the snowpack. Many areas in southwest Montana experienced natural and human-triggered avalanche activity in late December with the post cold-snap storm snow failing on this weak layer.

We are grateful to Keith Antonioli for his willingness to share this information.

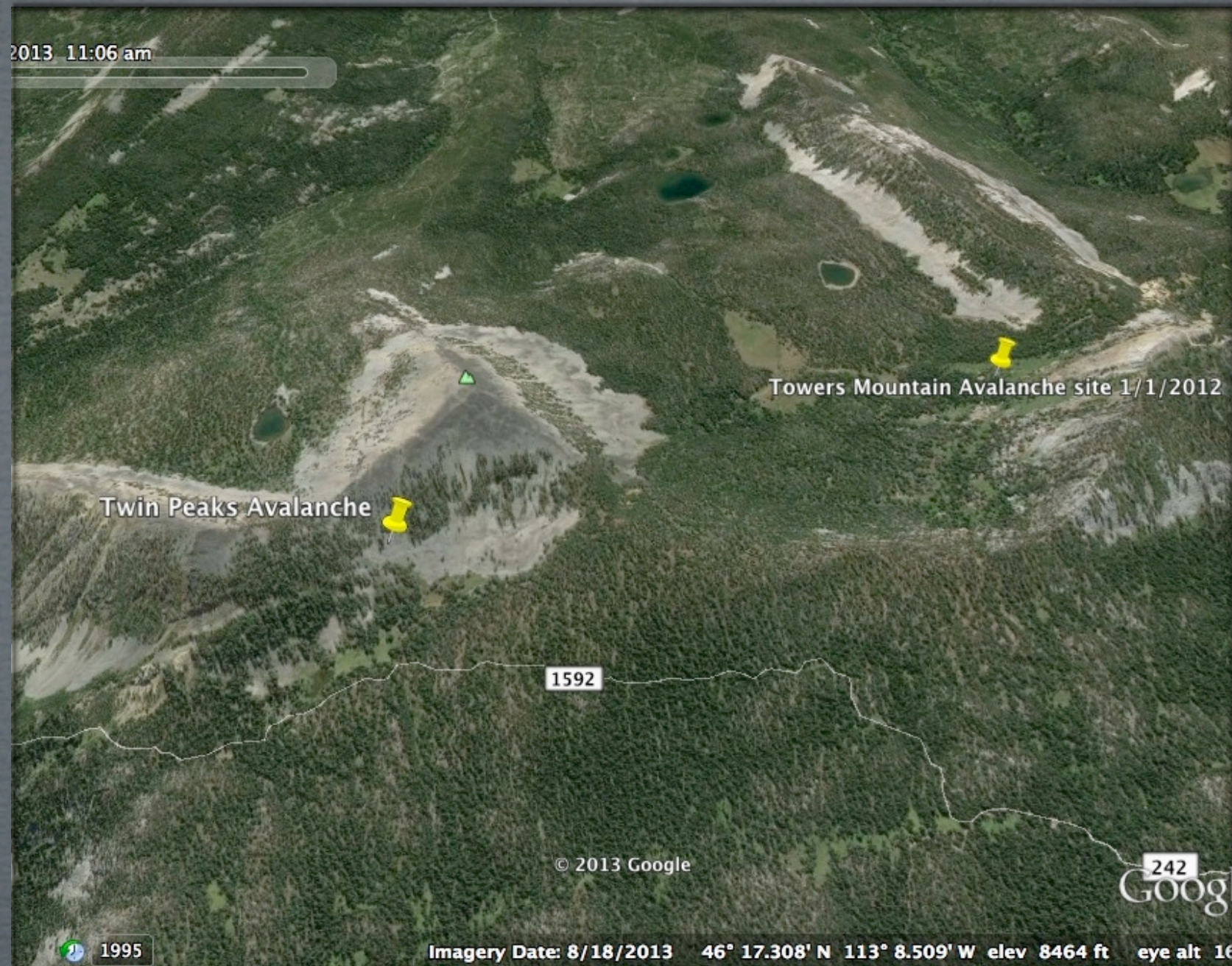
This incident illustrates the importance of getting into the habit of checking and wearing your safety equipment every time you ride. Even if the plan for the day is to ride the groomed trail or the flats, you should always have your safety equipment strapped on. Check your partners to see what gear they have and if it is in working order.

You never know when an emergency will arise.

For more information, contact the West Central Montana Avalanche Center at info@missoulaavalanche.org.



AERIAL VIEW OF THE RED LION AREA



AERIAL VIEW FACING SOUTH