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Approaching K2 from Baltoro Glacier, an uninitiated mountain trekker might find reality hard to believe. This towering peak of majesty can instantly become a gruesome killer because of avalanches.

Climbers on most of the world's great mountains have been "washed away" by hurtling torrents of snow. Skiers enjoying a day of alpine beauty have met the same fate.

America's worst avalanche occurred at a town called Wellington, located in the High Cascades of Washington State. Two trains, forced by a blizzard to stop at Wellington station, were filled with sleeping workers and passengers on the 1st of March, 1910.

At about 1 am, local time, a massive slab of snow descended on the station, hurtling the rail cars 150 feet into the river valley below. A recent forest fire had ruined nearby trees which might have mitigated the Wellington disaster.

What causes such an avalanche? Are there warning signs? Are they survivable?

Contrary to common myths, avalanches often do NOT strike without warning. Surprisingly, they are sometimes caused by people. According to Bruce Tremper, Director of the Utah Avalanche Forecast Center:

In 95 percent of all avalanche accidents, the avalanche is triggered by the victim, or someone in the victim's party.

That's a sobering thought. So is this:

An average-sized avalanche travels around 80 mph and it's nearly impossible for someone to outrun an avalanche or even have time to get out of the way.

The most dangerous type of avalanche (a dry slab) acts like a dinner plate that slides off the table. A huge "slab" of snow slides away from the mountain. When the slab shatters, the victim is often in the middle - with no means of escape.

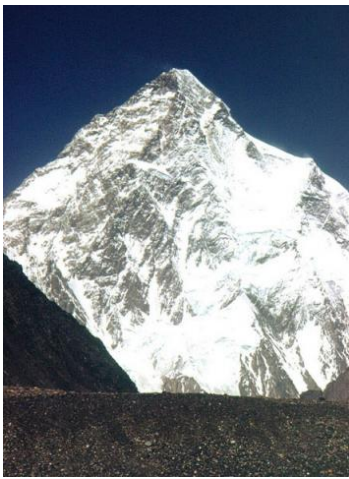
A wet-slab avalanche covers a smaller area, moves more slowly (around 20 miles per hour), and is survivable. Incredible avalanche video footage is available on line, thanks to NOVA. Follow the links to view spectacular sights.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/AVALANCHES-Vertical-Limit-K2-The-Savage-Mountain)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/AVALANCHES-Vertical-Limit-K2-The-Savage-Mountain>

See [Learning Tasks for this story online at:](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/AVALANCHES-Vertical-Limit-K2-The-Savage-Mountain)

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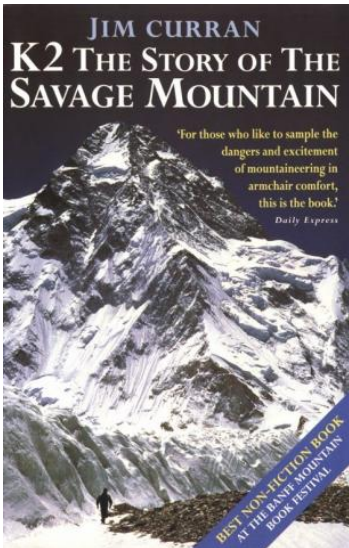


K2 - From the Baltoro Glacier

Image online, courtesy [Ev-K2-CNR](#) ("Keep K2 Clean").

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K2: The Story of the Savage Mountain - by Jim Curran

Image online, courtesy [amazon.com](#) website.

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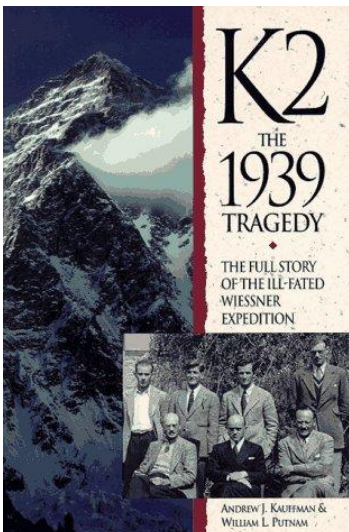
<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/K2-The-Story-of-the-Savage-Mountain-by-Jim-Curran>



Summit of K2

Photo by Adam Jacob Muller. Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC BY-SA 3.0](#).

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K2: The 1939 Tragedy - by Andrew J. Kauffman

Image online, courtesy [amazon.com](#) website.

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Dry Slab Avalanche

Photo by Dr. Bruce Jamieson. Image online, courtesy What is Civil Engineering (a Canadian website).

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Avalanche - Sliding Off the Mountain Side

Photo by P. Chernouss; image online, courtesy Avalanche.org

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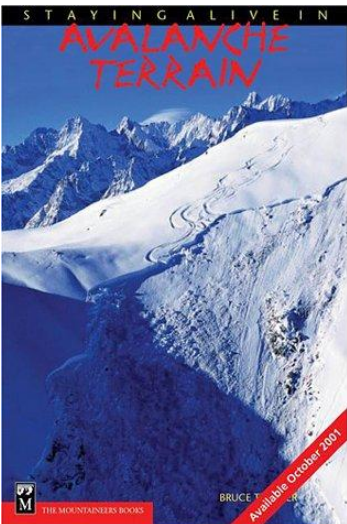
Avalanche - Snow Slides Away From the Mountain

Image online, courtesy the Colorado Avalanche Information Center website.

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Staying Alive in Avalanche Terrain

Image online, courtesy amazon.com website.

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Wellington Disaster - America's Worst Avalanche

Video about the Wellington Avalanche by FistyCuff1. Online, courtesy FistyCuff via YouTube.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Wellington-Disaster-America-s-Worst-Avalanche>