A Lifetime of Learning in the Winter of 2008

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The winter of 2008 produced a series of persistent weak layers that plagued backcountry skiers from the very beginning of the season. These layers formed a snowpack, which consistently delivered a large number of anomalous avalanches throughout the Columbia and Rocky Mountains.

Some of the greatest learning tools available to avalanche professionals are the stories and pictures passed on by people who have lived through years and conditions similar to those of 2008 in western Canada.

This presentation will be a series of short case studies of significant avalanches that occurred in guiding operations focusing on the February 26th surface hoar layer. This persistent weak layer created an unusual set of problems, which broke the rules of terrain and snowpack assessment. In the guiding world, where “the show must go on”, these conditions had to be managed in very unique and creative ways and forced operations to think outside of the box.