

# Why Wouldn't you?

You'll likely never need this information, but it might just save a life... and it might be your own.

Words Mark Watson / Photos inciteimages



In early 2016 I found myself atop an Alaskan peak, many miles from the nearest civilisation.

I remember sunrays filtering through late afternoon cloud and the world turning golden as I peered down the backside of the snow-laden knife-edge ridge on which I stood. There appeared to be nothing but thin air between me and the crevasses on the glacier, some 3000ft below.

My emotions balanced on equal doses of adrenaline and fear but I was reassured in the company of my four experienced companions who were the instigators of this remote big-mountain photo, doco and filming project.

Of my fellow winter explorers, two were professional athletes and two were winter-sport filmmakers, all from mountain communities in New Zealand and the USA. I was the only Australian.

Strapping into my split-board I prepared to tentatively drop into the steepest line of my life and it kind of hit me: "Help's a bloody long way off if 'Sh#t goes wrong!'"

My heavy backpack was full of camera gear, meaning no space for an avalanche airbag but I felt secure in the knowledge we were all kitted with beacons, shovels and probes, and so I blindly trusted in my comrades' judgement – two of whom had already descended down steep parallel spines to my left.

Oddly, what occurred to me in that very moment was a realisation of my personal lack of snowpack knowledge and my reliance on others for life and death decision-making. Atop this ridge, I acknowledged to myself that not only did I rely on my team for safety, but they relied on me to 'know my stuff' in the event of an emergency, and I questioned whether I could fulfill their expectations if sh#t did hit the fan.

As luck would have it, the next few turns were the best of my life – but I decided there and then that immediately on my return to civilisation I would upgrade my knowledge and undertake an Avalanche Safety Training course.

Little did I know my lack of knowledge was not the exception to the rule, but rather 'the norm' when it comes to avalanche and backcountry awareness amongst Australians, and I was about to open a can of worms.

**WE HAVE RIPTIDES, NOT AVALANCHES IN AU**

Lets be honest... we live in one of the driest and flattest continents on earth so you can be forgiven for ➤