

Probing 101

Avalanche probes are essential pieces of snow safety equipment that should always be carried in your pack. A probe is best used in conjunction with an avalanche beacon.

Beacon Search Probing

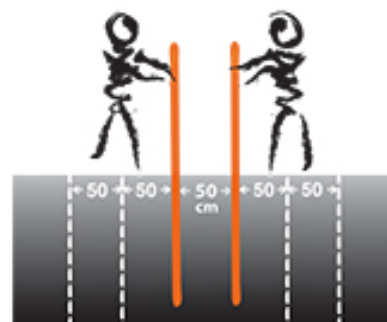
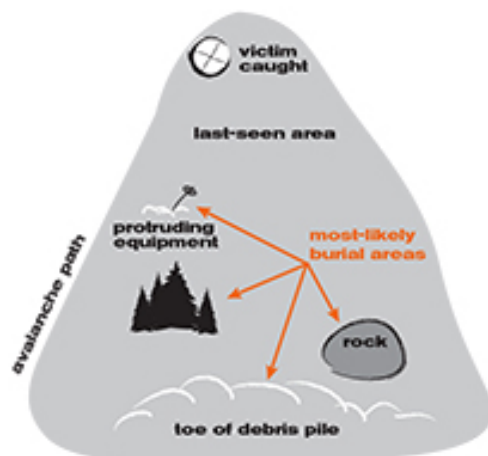
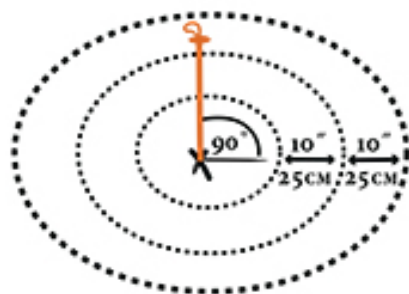
The pinpoint search (within three meters) is the trickiest part of a fine search. A probe can quickly confirm the location and depth of burial. Probes with depth markings aid in determining exact depth and appropriate excavation area size. From your lowest distance reading, probe 10 in (25cm) apart in concentric circles. Since the pinpoint search is done along the snow surface, insert probe perpendicular to the surface, not straight down. After striking the victim, leave in place and start shoveling downhill of the probe. Recommended probe length: 1.8 to 3 meters.

Spot Probing

Spot probing is performed if beacons are not used. Probe up to 6 feet deep (1.5 m) in likely burial spots. These include the fall line below last-seen-area; around the victim's equipment on surface; above and below rocks & trees; depressions, curves, and the toe of the debris pile. Studies show that avalanche victims rarely survive below 6 feet (1.5 meters). Therefore a live recovery is more likely if you probe more areas than if you probe deeper. Recommended probe length: 2 to 3 meters.

Organized Probe Lines

Usually performed by search-and-rescue groups outside the victim's own party. Rarely result in live recoveries. Searchers line up wrist-to-wrist (arms outstretched) across the slope, make three holes in a line, 50cm apart, then move forward one step and repeat. Probing depth should be consistent between all searchers. Long probes enable searchers to stand upright while probing, minimizing back fatigue. Recommended probe length: 3 to 3.5 meters.



To find an avalanche educator or BCA Beacon Training Park near you, check out www.backcountryaccess.com/education.



Stealth 270 Probe

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