

Two ski tourers killed in Belledonne

Two ski tourers have been killed, probably by an avalanche, while descending from a night in the Pra refuge in the Belledonne mountain range. The incident occurred on Saturday during heavy snow and poor visibility.



Lac du Crozet

Thomas Dupraz aged 27 years, resident of Saint-Thibaud-de-Couz in the Savoie and Benoît Vuillermet aged 24 years, resident of Meylan near Grenoble were found yesterday afternoon at 13h30 by the CRS des Alpes based at Domene airport north of Grenoble.

[Benoît Vuillermet](#) was an accomplished ski mountaineer and member of the CAF (French Alpine Club) in Chambéry. He had scored a notable 12th place in the Pierra Menta competition. He was familiar with the mountains around Grenoble.

Friends and family had raised the alarm Saturday evening when they did not return as planned. The two men had left on Friday for a two day ski tour in the sector. They had planned to stay Friday night in a snow cave next to the Pra refuge at 2200 meters. Not a difficult objective in itself however the slopes under the col du Pra, Grand Colon and around the lac du Crozet are known to be avalanche prone.



Lac du Crozet from the col du Pra

An initial search on Saturday evening discovered the men's car at the parking at [Freydière](#). Rescue workers were not able to climb further due to the weather conditions. Two helicopters belonging to the Sécurité Civile, were used in the search on Sunday morning. They found a signal around midday from the men's avalanche transceivers at the lac du Crozet. The men were buried under 150cm of snow close to the edge of the lake.

Captain Pierre Pelceneur of the CRS des Alpes advanced two theories as to what had occurred. Either they were pushed into the lake by a small avalanche, probably a natural slide. The slopes above the lake are steep, around 35 degrees and purge regularly. Or they were crossing the lake, possibly lost in the poor visibility, when the surface snow gave way. The police saw no signs of an avalanche but the tracks may have been covered by snow over the course of Saturday.

The skiers were properly equipped with avalanche beacons, probes and shovels. The refuge is not a difficult but visibility was very poor with 50cm of fresh snow accompanied by strong winds. The crossing above the lac du Crozet is exposed. The CRS warned that if skiers find themselves trapped by poor weather they should either sit out the storm and inform rescue services if they have a mobile phone signal. It is possible to reach the ski resort of Chamrousse from the refuge by a reasonable large and flat valley so it appears that the men didn't appreciate the danger in crossing the lake. The avalanche risk was Moderate (2/5) in the sector at the time, Considerable (3/5) above 2200 meters. The slopes above the lake extend to 2300 meters, the bulletin had warned of natural purges at this altitude as well as fresh slabs forming in the lee of north to north-west winds which would be sensitive to the passage of a skier.

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