



The screenshot shows the top of the Gazette.com website with a banner for "Local Colorado Springs entertainment". Below the banner is a navigation bar with "Gazette Home Page" and a "LOGIN" button. The main content area features a large article titled "Safety didn't save climber in avalanche" by Andrea Brown. The article text is visible on the right side of the screenshot. On the left side, there is a sidebar with "Today's Full Edition" and a "MORE INFORMATION" button. On the right side, there are vertical banners for "LIVE HIGH" and "ORDER".

**gazette.com**  
colorado springs

**Local** Colorado Springs  
entertainment

Gazette Home Page

**Safety didn't save climber in avalanche**

By **ANDREA BROWN - THE GAZETTE**

Kyle Fitzpatrick did everything right.

It was a way of life for the disciplined 22-year-old Missouri native who moved to Colorado Springs last summer.

Doing everything right didn't save him Saturday when an avalanche hit as he descended La Plata Peak north of Buena Vista with two other climbers from Colorado Springs.

Fitzpatrick, who was supposed to be married in two weeks, was with climbing buddies David Bennett, 39, and Joel Siebersma, 27. The three men, who had taken an avalanche safety class together last year, packed the proper shovels, probes and gear. They called the Colorado Avalanche Information Center hotline Friday and got the OK.

Saturday started out great. They headed up the mountain at 7:30 a.m., reaching the sunny summit about 2 p.m. They stopped briefly for a picture and to take in the sights from above.

An hour later, tragedy struck in a massive flash of white.

Bennett saw it happen.

"The avalanche broke about 10 yards below me. I saw Joel go down in the avalanche. I saw the big slide hit Kyle," he said.

"The chute was a mile long. They fell from about 13,600 feet down to about 11,200. I assumed both would be dead. It was completely a miracle that I could see Joel get up."

It took him 40 minutes to reach Siebersma, who was bleeding but walking.

The slide was the longest, scariest minute of Siebersma's life.

"My first thought was, 'I'm going to die,'" he said.

"It was like being thrown down a flights of stairs underwater, constantly being pushed and tumbled and turned. I was being bounced around and pulled up and pushed back down. It was light and dark, and light and dark. I was just trying to breathe while it was light."

Shock and relief followed.

"I ran down the hill screaming for Kyle," Siebersma said.

The two searched two hours for their friend.

"I found some of Kyle's gear. A snowshoe. His trekking poles. His shovel," Bennett said.

Fitzpatrick was nowhere in sight. They looked as long as possible.

"Joel was injured and hypothermic. I wanted to get him out. It took us about six hours just to get out," Bennett said.

Siebersma stayed overnight for observation in a Leadville hospital.

Chaffee County Sheriff's deputy Martin Johnson said rescuers found Fitzpatrick's body Sunday, buried under 6 feet to 8 feet of snow.

"A search and rescue dog from Crested Butte actually found him," Johnson said. "It is undetermined what triggered the avalanche. Many

Today's Full Edition

Today's Full Edition **LOGIN**

**The Gazette**

Palestinians mourn, protest

Carson troops work for clean break

Showing interest in change look for possible

Safety didn't save climber in avalanche

**MORE INFORMATION**

**LIVE HIGH**

**ORDER**

subsc  
The G

things trigger avalanches. We had quite a few avalanches with injuries last season. This is the first for this year. With the warming temperature, the snow is becoming unstable in the afternoon.”

Kay and Craig Fitzpatrick of Jefferson City, Mo., said Kyle, the oldest of their three children, took his role as a climber seriously.

“He was very careful. He didn’t take risks,” his mother said.

She said during college he spent two summers as a guide at Peak 3 Ministries, a high-adventure Colorado Springs ministry where he met his fiancée, Maria Burman.

He moved to Colorado Springs after graduation last year from Southwest Missouri State University, where he had a full academic and athletic scholarship.

The mother is comforted by the family’s strong Christian faith.

Still, she said, “It hurts. It is kind of a betrayal. The thing he loved is the thing that took him.”

Fitzpatrick worked at the downtown La Baguette.

“He pretty much put a smile on your face,” said coworker Kirk Bundy.

“He would tell goofy jokes, anything to lighten the mood. We’d be real busy he’d come up with one of those subtle puns to make you laugh. The customers really liked him.”

Added cook Daniel Walker, “I’m in shock. He had his whole life head of him.”

A memorial service will be held at 5:30 p.m. today at Vanguard Church.

Copyright 2004, The Gazette, a division of Freedom Colorado Information. All rights reserved. Contact us.