

AIARE L3: A Student's Perspective

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I have often found that long road trips provide ample opportunity for reflection. As the miles ticked away and the glorious San Juan Mountains slowly faded from my rearview mirror, I relished in the sense of accomplishment, having just successfully completed the AIARE Level 3 Course in Silverton, Colorado. I also couldn't help but reflect on the change in my perspective. A week earlier, as I crawled over Red Mountain Pass into a major winter storm, my mind was as tumultuous as the weather outside my windows. In the weeks leading up to the course, when asked what I would be learning, my typical response was to shrug my shoulders and offer the one-word response "forecasting," which was as much a question as an answer.

An informal poll of my classmates found that most were in attendance because we had to be – the AIARE L3 satisfied the avalanche education requirement of the American Mountain Guide Association (AMGA) for the Alpine and Ski Disciplines. The concept that the L3 would provide additional benefits was still a vague notion in our minds.

After taking some time to decompress, I realize that I have gained a lot more from the AIARE L3 than simply checking off a prerequisite for the AMGA. Upon completion of the Level 2 course, I felt that I had a nice set of tools, but the ability to utilize all of those tools to build a coherent product was somewhat lacking. I could recite test results and spew jargon, but would often struggle to translate that same information to language that a lay person could comprehend. The Level 3 course refined my existing abilities, conferred additional and more sophisticated tools, and most importantly, provided a framework for synthesizing all of the available information into a reliable stability analysis and forecast. All of these benefits, along with the L3 examination process, separate the experienced recreationalist from the true avalanche professional.

In short, completion of the L3 has made me a better instructor in the AIARE L1 program; it has inspired greater confidence from my students, enabled me to provide a better product to my ski clients, and of equal importance, it has allowed me to have even more fun in my own adventures.