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Winter 2021



The Quarterly Publication of the Mountain Rescue Association

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Honor For Hoist: **A Team Honor Showcases** **Growing Influence in Air Rescue**

Oregon Team, Washington Rescue
MEDCOM: Spinal Injuries



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Winter 2021

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ON THE COVER: A view of Crestone Needle from the CHRT blackhawk helicopter. (Dale Atkins)

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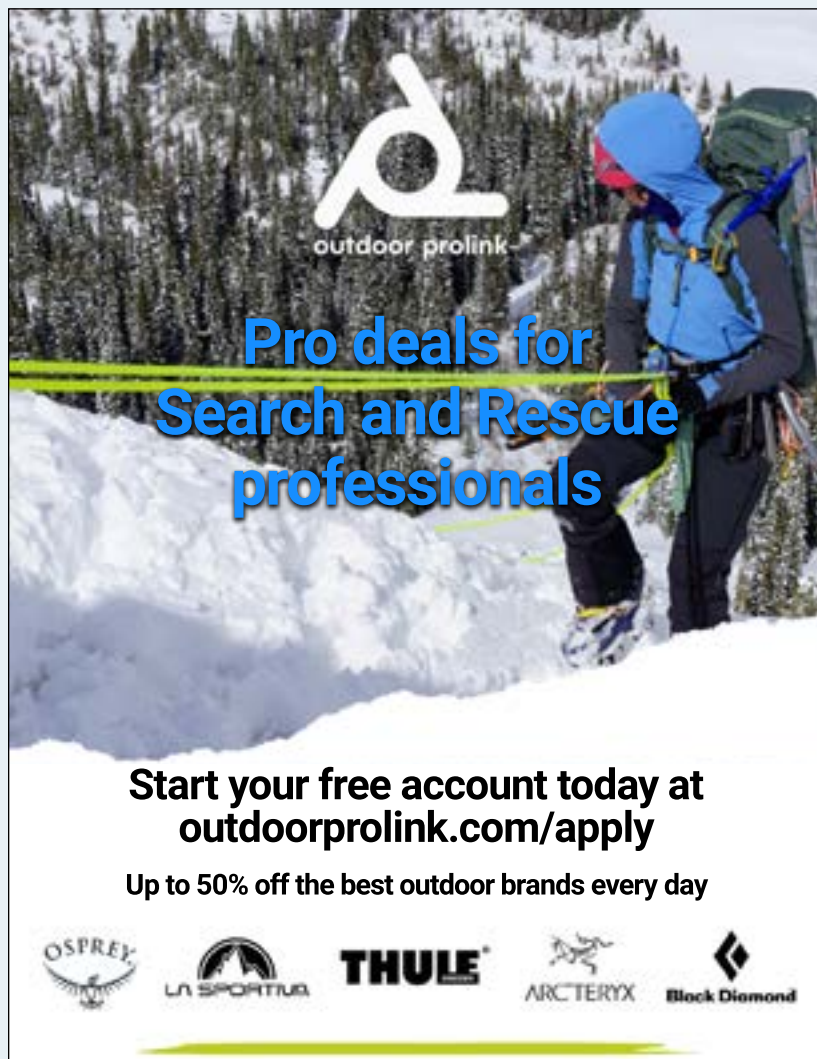
President's Message

THE OTHER SIDE

It was New Year's Day at 4:30 AM, my phone buzzed on the night stand. I glanced at the caller ID, "Oh it's Russ" I thought. What is he calling for? Oh right, I'm in Italy and it is still New Year's Eve in Seattle. He probably wants to know if we are doing our annual New Year's Eve hike up Mt. Si or Mailbox Peak. I silence the phone and ignore the call. But something is bothering me so I look at my phone again. Eight missed mission texts and two missed calls from my cousin's wife. "Huh!" I thought. Maggie rarely calls me.

I look at the mission texts which are for an overdue 65 y/o male on Granite Mtn. I try to do some mental math about the time difference but quickly realize it doesn't matter. I call Russ back. The connection is clear but I can tell he is driving. By now, my brain has made the connection between the mission texts, Maggie's missed call and Russ's call to know that my cousin, Doug Walker is overdue on a hike. "Hey Russ," I say with trepidation. "Hey Doug, I think your cousin is overdue on Granite. We are heading there now." I reply to Russ saying something like, "yeah, I'm thinking so too."

Russ and I talk briefly about the route Doug would likely be on, the same route I've hiked with Doug countless times in the past. "Yep, Doug would be on the traditional winter route up the ridge" I confirm. "I'm thinking broken



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leg higher up on the mountain," I tell Russ as we talk about mission planning. Then I hear Russ talking to someone and then shout, "skis are useless on this route" audibly perturbed that the recipient didn't seem to know this already. Russ then says, "We are heading up, I gotta go, I'll keep you posted."

Doug Walker is my cousin and climbing mentor. I first came out to Seattle in 1992 for an internship at Doug's company (WRQ) and while the work was interesting, Doug introduced me to rock climbing, mountaineering and alpine climbing. Always ambitious for people he takes climbing, my first alpine

“hike” with Doug was the Fisher Chimneys route up Mt. Shuksan in the North Cascades. Mt. Shuksan is a 9,131 ft summit which is typically done as an overnight trip. We did the trip in less than 12 hours and even had time for a quick lunch at the summit.

By now, I am wide awake. I’m ready to go on this mission to locate my cousin, but I’m thousands of miles away, powerless to do anything. The next text I get is from Doug Caley, another close teammate. The text says, “I’m in base, Team 1 is in the field, conditions not ideal.” I relay as much information as I have on the route that my cousin would most likely have taken earlier in the day. Knowing that this route has vehicle size boulders that would be snow covered, I continue to think that my cousin has punched through the snow and likely broken a leg. Depending on the conditions, he is likely making his way down or has dug a snow cave to wait for daylight.

My family is awake now and I’ve told them that Doug is overdue. We are having breakfast when I get a text from Caley at base saying that Team 1 has reached the summit in extreme winds and has not located Doug. Team 1 is digging a snow cave and will continue to search in the morning. Now there won’t be any updates for the next six hours and still there is nothing I can do. My family is wrapping up our trip in the Dolomites with some toboggan sledding with the kids before catching a train to Venice for our flight back to Seattle. It is difficult to enjoy the day knowing my cousin and teammates are probably shivering through the night.

Later in the afternoon I get a text from Caley still in base, that says Team 1 is up and searching the summit area and MRA teams Olympic Mountain Rescue, Tacoma Mountain Rescue and Everett Mountain Rescue are coming to help with the search. While I don’t know everyone on our neighboring teams, I know they are all very capable and committed to our mission. We also have several non-MRA teams at base and in the field supporting the mission from King County Search and Rescue (KC ESAR, KC 4x4, KC IST, KC SAR Dogs, KC SPART) who are very capable in their respective disciplines.

By now I’m on the train to Venice with my family leaving the mountains behind. The twilight has faded to almost complete darkness outside and the train has come to a stop at a station to disembark passengers. I’m sitting next to my wife, Rachel and our kids are in the seats behind us. The next text I get from Caley, diligently running base operations is a matter of fact, blow to the gut. The text says, “Found Doug, wrapped around a tree, not breathing, no pulse, I’m sorry.” While the words register, I’m still in disbelief as we arrive at the Venice airport hotel.

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I tell this story because I think we often forget or tend to minimize the value of what we do. The efforts of the teams on this one mission were, in my mind, truly heroic. When I think about the number of teams in the MRA and the number of missions we get to go on each year, I am humbled by the breadth of influence you have on so many people across the nation and around the world. If you take one mission that you were on in the last year, the impact you have locating or rescuing one subject is exponential. If you then take all the missions your team has conducted over the past year or that you have been on in your SAR career, frankly the number of people you have impacted is mind-blowing, not to mention the future that person may have after they were rescued.

With this in mind, I encourage you to think about who our “customers” are and the roles we get to participate in. Every person who responds plays a key role in executing on that mission. Sure, there will always be politics whether it’s team, agency or whatever is pressing at the moment, and I encourage us to always remember why we are here in the first place. *To save lives through rescue and mountain safety education.*

Doug McCall
President

Team Honored for Hoist Rescue

Rick Lindfors - Meridian Editor in Chief

Members of the Colorado Hoist team received a special honor this year for an impressive rescue done with members of the Colorado National Guard. The team rescued an injured climber from Crestone Needle in September 2020 by doing a hoist rescue from a Blackhawk Helicopter. The members involved received the rescue of the year award from the Dustoff Association, a group that recognizes and supports MEDEVAC personnel in the armed forces. This was the first time the award was given to civilian rescuers. While the award is impressive, the team is building a legacy that will likely impact the broader armed forces as well as civilian rescue teams.

The Colorado Hoist Rescue Team was formed in 2016 with members of Colorado Mountain Rescue teams and the Colorado National Guard with the goal of rescuing people in remote and difficult areas. Army Chief Warrant Officer Clayton Horney sparked the idea, according to CHRT team member and Alpine Rescue Team member Michael Everist. Some of the early meetings to establish the team happened over lunch. "A lot of this started, believe it or not, at TGI Friday's," said Everist. A similar

program already existed between Colorado Army National Guard High-Altitude ARNG Aviation Training Site, Mountain Rescue Aspen and Vail Mountain Rescue. CHRT now comprises the Colorado National Guard, Alpine Rescue Team, Rocky Mountain Rescue Group, Mountain Rescue Aspen and Vail Mountain Rescue working out of two bases in the state. CW3 Horney brought the necessary players together to establish procedures and guidance. Colonel William Gentle then brought the idea to command staff. "We got approval on a lot of pieces of equipment we wanted to use, but were not necessarily Army standard," said Everist.

Since the team's foundation, other elements of the Army started to take notice of not just the equipment, but also the tactics. Most notable is the use of dynamic hoisting. Static hoisting, where a helicopter is stationary while lifting a patient, creates the risk of a litter spinning in the rotorwash from the chopper. A tagline is needed to prevent this happening. A recent example of this going wrong was the rescue of an Arizona woman in June of 2019 that saw the litter spinning rapidly underneath the helicopter. This incident sparked nationwide conversation



about helicopter rescue operations and procedures. Dynamic hoisting involves the helicopter moving slowly forward (five to ten knots) while lifting the patient. With the movement, the rotorwash is behind the aircraft and the patient, lowering the risk of spinning. The method is not only safer, but faster. Dynamic hoisting was already practiced by European agencies. With CHRT's success in the practice, other elements of the army have noticed, and are starting to use it.

The unit trains regularly. They do a hoist every 90 days to maintain currency. There are also various other training events, including multi-day events twice a year. Other agencies such as Flight for Life and Colorado Division of Fire Prevention and Control also take part in meetings with the team.

"It had a slow but steady start," said Everist, "We continue to build [...] I think the speed has been about right."

Fast forward to September of 2020 and the injured climber on Crestone Needle, which summits at more than 13,000 feet. Days before the rescue, a snowstorm hit the area, with some ice lingering around the summit afterwards. A pair of climbers were on a technical route when one of them took a 30-foot fall on a near-vertical face. He hit a ledge just as his rope went taught. The initial emergency reports indicated the climber had suffered a broken ankle. After considering their options, responders made the call to do a hoist rescue, with a Colorado National



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Guard Blackhawk helicopter taking off from Buckley air base near Denver the next morning. The climbers spent the night on the ledge, which was only about the size of a dining room table. Only one person could lie down at a time, and the two tried to lay on top of each other to keep each other warm.

On board with the helicopter crew were Alpine Rescue Team members Dale Atkins and Michael Griffin. "I just happened to have my GoPro and didn't screw it up capturing the footage," said Atkins.

The warm weather challenged the rescue crew on their first attempt. It was a warm day with lower air pressure,



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Dale Atkins bumps fists with a helicopter crew chief before being lowered to retrieve a subject (Dale Atkins)

meaning the helicopter couldn't perform as well. With those conditions, the pilots decided a hoist wouldn't be possible. On the way back to base, the team discussed their options. One was dropping Atkins and Everist off at the summit and having them rappel down 400 feet to the subjects, and then work down 2,000 feet with the subject. "We came away with the thinking that if we could get aircraft performance at a level within the margins, the hoist is the better way to do this," said Atkins.

The subjects stayed informed of the situation via cell phone as the helicopter returned to base to try and rework their plan. Once at base, the helicopter crew took everything out of the aircraft that they could. That included removing some fuel, rescue gear and even Michael Everist. In all, the crew removed about 400 pounds from the helicopter. "It happens, it's not unusual for us to drop a rescuer," said Atkins, noting he had been in the same position in a previous mission. With that weight dropped, the pilots calculated that the aircraft would perform as needed. However, they would only have 12 minutes to get both subjects and then return to refuel.

The helicopter approached the subjects with a slight headwind, further improving performance. Once over the subjects, the crew lowered Atkins to the table-sized ledge. Atkins secured the first man and signaled to the helicopter to begin moving away from the ledge in the dynamic hoist operation. Once inside the helicopter, the rescue harness was prepared again and the crew returned for the second

person. Once both were on board, the helicopter went straight to the airport in Alamosa for fuel.

On the flight, Atkins was able to assess the injured climber. The ankle turned out to be sprained. He had tried to re-climb, but wasn't able to after the fall. His partner was only on his first multi-pitch climb and wasn't able to finish it off. In July, the man who fell was able to return to Crestone and finish the climb after further working on his climbing skills.

Maj. Christopher Moskoff, CW3 Greg White, SFC Steven Leflar, SSG Jesse Bavender, Atkins and Griffin were awarded the Rescue of the Year Award from the Dustoff Association in August 2021. "It's fantastic," said Everist. "There's a lot of work done together to make that happen. I'm very proud of those guys and proud of the organization and I think the guys on the Army side feel the same way."



Mike Griffin, Maj. Moskoff, CW3 White and Dale Atkins receive the Dustoff Association's 2020 Rescue of the Year Award in Columbus, GA (Dustoff Association)

Photo by Joyce
McCown on Unsplash

Spinal Cord Protection in the Backcountry

Benjamin Lantow, MBA, BSN, RN, NPR, CFRN

One of the most contentious issues in backcountry rescue is how and when to implement spinal motion restriction. Since so many rescues involve significant mechanisms or spinal injuries, this discussion occurs frequently. Considerations in the backcountry are very different from those of a frontcountry or traditional emergency medical services (EMS) agency. The impact of spinal immobilization on the rescue effort can impose significant manpower and time requirements, by necessitating lengthy litter carries or technical systems opposed to a straightforward hike out. The intention of this article is to explain the history of spinal precautions, to summarize new research and recommendations, and to discuss some of the backcountry specific considerations around the decision to immobilize.

HISTORY

Spinal precautions with a stiff cervical collar and long backboard have been practiced in one form or another since the 1960s. Some of the initial recommendations for spinal injury care were based upon consensus criteria created by the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons (AAOS) and published in the first EMS textbook in 1971¹. In the late 1970s there were several studies suggesting a mechanism of injury based approach to immobilization², which resulted in almost all trauma patients being placed into spinal immobilization using a stiff collar and long spine board. To this day many organizations use protocols based upon this generation of thought.³



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Most new guidelines are based on both physiologic criteria and mechanism of injury; however, guidelines vary greatly between organizations. Research in the last 20 years has repeatedly demonstrated that a more limited use of spinal motion restriction based on physiologic criteria is effective in managing spinal injuries. In one study, 95% of spinal trauma was identified using a prehospital spinal clearance tool; out of a total of more than 8900 patients, only 15 spinal injuries were missed.⁴ These protocols allow for safe and accurate determination of spinal cord protection needs in trauma patients.⁵ In fact, several studies have found that over application of spinal immobilization can cause further motion of the neck, cause further discomfort in otherwise healthy patients, or place patients at risk of pressure ulcers. These side effects can complicate assessment and diagnosis and result in prolonged hospitalizations.⁶⁻⁸

This new data has resulted in significant changes to EMS protocols; unfortunately, due to the fragmented

systems throughout the US, there is no uniform consensus on protocols or how to implement new research. For backcountry professionals, however, the Wilderness Medicine Society (WMS) has led the way with a structured discussion and set of recommendations. The clinical practice

guidelines updated in 2019 from WMS were developed by a multidisciplinary team based on an in depth review of the literature.⁹

While the updated WMS clinical practice guidelines offer an in depth discussion of each point, the key take away point is highlighted here.

In the wilderness environment, the goal of spinal assessment and care should not be to definitively rule out or recognize all forms of spine injury. Rather, the goal should be to minimize the risk of missing and/or exacerbating a potentially unstable spine injury. The risk of missing such an injury should be appropriately calibrated against the risk of exposing



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rescuers to the potential for serious injury or causing further injury to the patient. Definitive spinal evaluation can and should be performed upon arrival at an appropriate medical center but is not a feasible goal for wilderness medical care.⁹

The WMS recommendations also include some directly actionable items for search and rescue (SAR) organizations:

1. Spinal “immobilization” is not the goal of pre-hospital care. Spinal cord protection is instead the desired goal which can be reached using less aggressive methods; currently the most favored of these is by restricting spinal motion.
2. Lift and slide using the trap squeeze method and body

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elevation and movement (BEAM) is a safer method than log rolling patients, and should be utilized whenever possible.

3. Rigid c-collars are not recommended for use in the backcountry. Instead use a soft collar or simply instruct the patient to limit motion of their neck.
4. Long backboards should not be used with the goal of restricting spinal motion, only for temporary movements if required. Vacuum mattresses are an alternative that provide safe and effective stabilization of the spine without the detrimental effects of backboards. Vacuum splints should be the preferred method of spinal motion restriction over rigid collars or backboards.
5. Spinal motion restriction is not indicated for isolated penetrating trauma. While fairly rare in the backcountry, these cases are not entirely absent.

The caveat, and significant hurdle, is aligning the algorithm with local protocols and policies. It is particularly important to partner with team medical direction when implementing and following a SAR-specific guideline.

Many teams benefit from having medical direction from within the team; however numerous other teams are challenged by external medical direction that is unfamiliar with the unique environments in which SAR operates, or no medical direction at all. Regardless, all teams must weigh recommendations such as those from the WMS against a local protocol set often written for traditional EMS organizations. This disconnect can lead to confusion and mismanagement of patient care.

IMPLEMENTATION AND NEXT STEPS

Whether utilizing the WMS recommendations or a locally developed decision tree, use of a single standardized protocol for spinal immobilization between SAR agency and transporting EMS agencies is the key to successful and safe patient care. Development of this protocol should be guided by safe patient care, with consideration given to the implications of an austere environment and the potential impact of extrication time often measured in hours or even days. A close partnership with medical direction and use of the more contemporary references in this article can be a framework for those decisions.

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Rats Rescue on Rainier

Rick Lindfors - Editor in Chief

Members of the Hood River Crag Rats on Mt. Rainier in January 2021

Every now and then, a team takes on a feat that they haven't done in some time. For the Crag Rats based in Hood River, Oregon, that feat was making a rescue on Mt. Rainier in Washington, something that hadn't been done in nearly a century. The famous Cascade Peak is usually patrolled and serviced by Washington teams, but Crag Rats member Christopher Tilburg learned of an opportunity to sign up for work on the mountain through a member of Olympic Mountain Rescue. A patrol went to the mountain in January and based out of a cabin in Longmire.

According to Tilburg, the first few days of the excursion were uneventful. The first day, January 14th, saw warm and sunny weather with temperatures around 38 degrees. The Crag Rats team skied to Panorama Point down into Edith Creek. On January 15th, the group patrolled from Narada Falls, past Reflection Lake, to the Castle Saddle. They skied the south side of the Castle Saddle before returning on the north side. The south side was sun-warmed soft snow, the

north side was firm but with steep terrain. The weather was partly cloudy with a light but warm wind.

The Crag Rats team would be called into action on January 16th. The group started the day by skiing to the Muir Snowfield above McClure Rock and down into Edith Creek. The skies were clear but windy with hard frozen snow above 7,000 feet, which got softer as they descended. The team saw around 50 people climbing the Muir snowfield, many ill-prepared in poor clothing, small packs, no traction devices, and no ice axes.

The Crag Rats team was contacted at 1600 hours by the national park service to help a group of hikers who had tried to ascend the Muir Snowfield. They had ascended to about 9,000 feet and were on the way down but got into trouble near Moon Rocks. Like other people on the mountain, they weren't prepared for glacier climbing. "They didn't really have snow climbing equipment," said Tilburg. The group was all dressed in wet cotton and wearing soft hiking boots with broken traction cables. "They overestimated how far



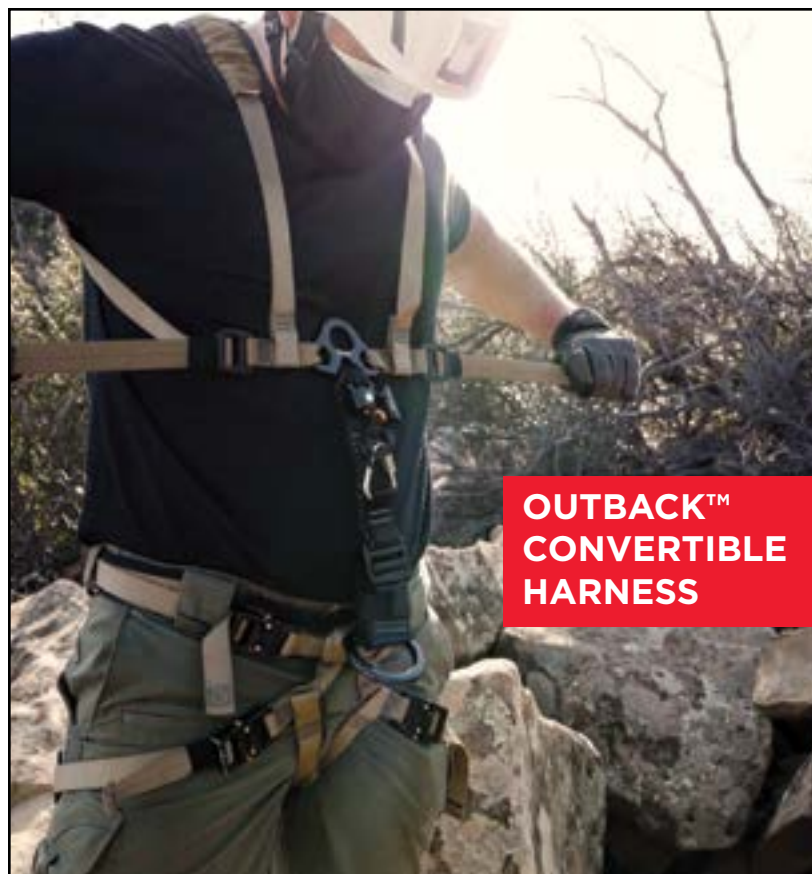
Rescuers build an anchor from snow with ice axes while evacuating a group of injured hikers.

they had gone, so by the time they decided to turn around, it was pretty close to dark,” said Tilburg. By the time they started going down, things got dark and they lost their way.

The Crag Rats team responded along with a park ranger, while additional rangers and nordic patrol stood by. The hasty team had the group’s GPS coordinates made contact with the group around 2100 hours at 7,800 feet after spotting their headlamps.

Two of the hikers were moderately hypothermic and one had an injured knee. He had twisted it while walking downhill on the ice. The rescue team wrapped the knee with a SAM splint and also gave the group insulation and food to help fight off the cold.

All three of the lost hikers could still walk, and the rescue team began leading them down as the winds began to gust upwards of 40 miles per hour. The team met a second group of rescuers at Panorama Point, which brought harnesses, helmets, crampons and rope for the subjects. “We made three consecutive descents using prussiks for safety. Each subject was paired with a Crag Rats chaperone,” said Tilburg. The first belay station was made with two vertical skis and a buried ice axe. The second two belay stations down Panorama Face were made with three ice axes. The team had the subjects out of the area by 2300, completing the first Crag Rats Rescue at Mt. Rainier National Park since 1929.



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Meet The Rescuer: Sandy Jordan

Linda Wacht - Meridian Contributor

The MRA DEI committee is excited to feature Sandy Jordan. Sandy is a fourteen year veteran of Larimer County Search and Rescue (LCSAR) in Colorado. When I interviewed, her team was dealing with the aftermath of the Poudre Canyon flooding, including two missing people. "To see the devastation in person is just terrible," she said. "That's what we do, but we see things other people just don't see."

Sandy came to Colorado in 2006 from rural New Jersey. Like many transplants, she had never heard of search and rescue. Her first encounter with search and rescue was a wilderness survival course she took that was a fundraiser for SAR. "The instructor used examples from search and rescue, which made the class more interesting."

Sandy Jordan and her dog.



Sandy has numerous roles with her team. She is a field coordinator and SAR manager on the operations side. She has been on the executive board. For field activities,

she enjoys playing in the snow. But it is the people more than the jobs that bring her the highest feeling of reward. "I love the people I work with. I admire them. It is exciting to encounter other teams in Colorado and across the country who also embrace this life."

Her outdoor pursuits are even more numerous. She is a mountain and road biker, snowboards at resorts and cross country skis in the canyons. These days, she tends to stick to the I-70 corridor for her snow excursions, but in college she spent a Memorial Day weekend at Mt. Washington in classic style. "Wooden skis. Cable bindings. Lace-up leather boots. It was pre-Gore-Tex."

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"We camped two miles in. We'd hike up for a half hour, then be back down in four seconds. It was exciting then. Now, not so much."

"I had a friend, Todd, who told me once, 'You are so comfortable up high; you should really take up rock climbing.' I told him I didn't need another expensive hobby!" she laughs. "I should have listened to Todd," she added wistfully.

Sandy's most impactful mission happened one afternoon after a dog training in Estes Park. "After the training, we went to a restaurant for lunch. It was about two or three o'clock. The call came for a fallen ice climber in Big Thompson Canyon."

"Loveland Fire had gotten there first and lowered the subject part way. Our team did the rest. She had a fractured leg. A teammate repackaged her on the frozen waterfall. We were working the ropes from above. We carried the litter out to the ambulance. It was dark by the time we were finished."

"I was just so overwhelmed with what the team had done. It was just incredible. Everything we did in our training, everything we practiced, it was so exciting to see it all



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come together. I went around to everyone and told them how proud I was of them, how great they did."

"One of the older members just looked at me and said: 'What are you talking about? You were part of this.' And I was. I was part of this."

"Who does this? Who goes out at night? In the pitch black? In the rain? When you can't see a thing?"

"We do. We do this."

When it comes to JEDI, Sandy has lived in a world that does not value girls and women. She was a public school teacher for thirty-six years. She remembers winning Science Teacher of the Year one year and being asked "who did you sleep with".

Her experience in LCSAR has been completely different. She has never felt that being a woman, having grey hair, not having a strong mountaineering background has held her back on her team. She has always felt pushed and encouraged to do more; to be the one who goes over the edge, literally and figuratively.



Sandy Jordan and friends
while backpacking.

"When I first joined the DEI committee, I was surprised that other teams weren't the same. We encourage women, whether they're in their twenties or sixties, to step up even and especially when they feel they are not qualified or have the experience."

"How else will they get the experience?"

She does wish there was more ethnic and racial diversity. "It seems there are only a handful of rescuers who are not white. We mostly rescue white guys, but that's slowly changing. And our teams should look like the people we are rescuing." She acknowledges that it is a complex topic. "Maybe part of it is the cultural heritage, maybe getting out is just not something one does."

"All teams have this issue." She noted the recent MRA elections as an example. "The MRA voted for the two white guys, even though, for me, the more heartfelt speeches came from the other two candidates."

"It's not easy to change."

Sandy believes that inclusion starts from the beginning of a person's journey in search and rescue: during the orientation. "We have about 75 people who show up to orientations. When we tell them what to expect - the training, the night missions, the personal gear--that number immediately becomes half."

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"Don't discourage any background. We have people with disabilities on our team." She is referring to a teammate who is deaf with implants. She has backed him up whenever there was doubt. "Yes, it is going to be okay. I know he can do it."

"We find new places for people as they age. People who have two titanium knees, who have cancer. They have given so much. They are still of value. They are still valued."

"I make it a point to thank and honor each person for whatever they do, whether it was something they did on a mission or a software upgrade or sharing a story during a PSAR event or participation in a fundraising event. I send a private message, just between them and me, letting them know I really value and appreciate them."

"People want to be acknowledged and it is so easy to show them that someone noticed *them*."

As a career teacher, Sandy knows that diversity and inclusion starts within the team. "Look at every person who joins search and rescue. Each one has joined for a reason." She feels that each person and what they bring

to the team needs to be valued. "When people feel they are doing a good job, they are engaged and they keep going."

Sandy brags on her team's ability to be inclusive. From the eager beavers always jumping in to help to those who hang back, she feels everyone on her team helps to find a place for them. "There was one young man whose legs were literally shaking on his first rappel. As he went over, everyone was cheering and encouraging him. And he did it again. Now he always shows up--for PSAR, for missions, for wherever he can help."

"When you're on our team, if you're not sure about a new role, step up! When someone new leads a training, there are always others behind them. People will bring gear or a truck. Others will review the presentation and make suggestions. Someone will offer to demonstrate skills. You're never alone."

"And once you've successfully done it, you are willing to do it again."

Sandy gives one last piece of advice to the people in MRA. "What does it look like, this team that you want to be on? Make it that way."



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Letter from the Editor

Well, another year has come and gone. By the time you're reading this, you've endured a full year of me being at the editorial helm of this publication. I hope you've enjoyed things. Some of you may have gone so far as to print editions of Meridian for reading by the fireside. As someone who works in traditional media formats, I do appreciate the old-school consumption.

This time of year is usually when we look forward to the next year's achievements while reflecting on the year behind us. You definitely don't need me to tell you that this last year saw its fair share of challenges on the covid front along with the impacts on our operations. Our teammates in healthcare certainly didn't find the respite we had hoped for when the vaccine rollout started.

With that said, we certainly have plenty to look forward to in the next year. Things are slowly returning to the pre-pandemic ways, though I would not call it "normalizing" by any stretch of the term. I'll be travelling home for Christmas this year, something I haven't done since 2019. I hope many of you are able to do the same and enjoy your holiday traditions. This year I will add the Festivus

tradition of airing grievances since my day job found itself on the receiving end of a full-blown Russian cyber attack. Everything broke. Misery ran rampant. I learned new swear words. It's nothing like the spy movies make it out to be. And since I'll be travelling for the holidays, I'm open to an aluminum pole in my living room in lieu of the regular tree.

I encourage all of you to kick back and enjoy the holidays as we certainly deserve a moment's rest. I hope all of you find some joy to close out the year and do so with some good food and good company.

Of course, keep your 24 packs at the ready and batteries charged, since someone is bound to take a wrong turn or fall.

With a glass raised,

Rick Lindfors

Meridian Editor in Chief

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Highlights From the Year

2021 will probably be remembered by most as being an improvement over 2020. The past year of Meridian issues saw some incredible examples of MRA team prowess.

TRAINING, TRUST AND ALTRUISM – THE LEGACY OF TIM STAPLES

This story from Spring 2021 showed how West Valley Search and Rescue made sure the legacy of one of their members endured after his death. Tim Staples died in the line of duty in 2019, a devastating loss to the team. However, the team banded together to ensure that his legacy of education and kindness lived on.

SAVING MICHAEL KNAPINSKI

Rescuers recounted the efforts to save a man on Mt. Rainier, a mission that gained national attention due to the use of a little-known treatment that saved him from near-lethal hypothermia. Contributors from Tacoma Mountain Rescue, U.S. Navy and Seattle Mountain Rescue gave their accounts and expertise to show how all rescue elements from mountain extraction to medical treatment came together to save the man.

TEAMS NAVIGATE THE PANDEMIC

COVID-19 didn't leave in 2021. Teams once again needed to change their protocols for training, missions and recruiting. Recerts were postponed, zoom meetings were enacted, and teams figured out ways to keep functioning amid various changes and restrictions. The story from fall 2021 showcased how several teams managed to make things work.

NEW TEAM: COCHISE SAR

The fall 2021 issue profiled a new team entering the MRA from Arizona. Cochise SAR deals with a unique variety of terrain ranging from hot deserts to snowy mountain ranges. The team also takes on the task of rescuing undocumented immigrants who cross the U.S. - Mexico border and are ill-prepared for the conditions they encounter.



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