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Winter 2023



The Quarterly Publication of the Mountain Rescue Association

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How WVSAR works with Mt. Baldy

**MEDCOM: Common First
Responder Injuries**

**Alaska Team Receives
Major Award for Rescues**



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ON THE COVER: Members of West Valley Search and Rescue work to rescue hikers on Mt. Baldy in July, 2023 (WVSAR)



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President's Message

I had the good fortune to recently be in the San Juan mountains of Colorado. It was at the height of the fall color season and the aspens were glorious against the dusting of first snow on the high peaks. The change of seasons made me reflect on the changes ahead for the MRA. As most of you have by now seen, the MRA officer's committee sent out proposed bylaw and policy changes around our historic use of proxies for Board of Director votes. Although this was discussed at the Flagstaff conference, there were several emails in reply suggesting that the MRA is trying to limit the voting power of the regions or teams. This is simply not true.

The officer's committee is entrusted to manage the administrative responsibilities of the MRA and bring to the Board of Directors issues and concerns requiring a vote. As a non-profit entity incorporated in the State of Washington we are mandated to abide by the laws of that State.

Washington State passed a new Non-Profit Act effective January 2022. When Kayley Bell (MRA Executive secretary) submitted our annual report for the state in August 2022, Washington state said we must comply with the new act and have our bylaws reviewed. One of the attorneys who was part of writing this act was the person who did our bylaw review. Proxies are not allowed as a means of voting on our Board of Directors.

Go to this link for more details: [What You Need to Know About the New Washington Non-profit Corporation Act - Washington State Bar News \(wabarnews.org\)](https://www.wabarnews.org/2022/08/22/what-you-need-to-know-about-the-new-washington-non-profit-corporation-act/)

There are other changes that the MRA will need to make to be fully compliant but by far the most important was our use of proxies. It was for this reason that the proposed bylaw changes will be voted on in February. By Washington state law, we can no longer use proxies for our business meetings as we have been doing. The

officers are investigating how we can work with Zoom or other electronic conferencing to allow "in person" participation at the business meetings. There are also more specific requirements for how a Board of Directors representative for an individual team is identified. We will do our best to make these adjustments incrementally and with full transparency to the MRA membership. I would ask that the member teams decide early who will be your representative and be prepared to provide a statement in writing identifying that person. That will be for both in-person and any potential online participant at the business meeting.

The MRA may also choose to restructure how we do business as we discussed last Spring but this will require much more work, and time, from the membership to accomplish this. In the meantime, the proposed bylaw change will be a significant step towards legal compliance.

The MRA values the opinions of every member team. Increased participation will be one benefit of proxy elimination. Face to face conversations, even on zoom, accomplish so much more than email or simply letting your region chair make decisions for you. There will be challenges of course. We know the conferences are expensive to attend but we will continue to provide "discretionary" funds back to the regions to help supplement business meeting and conference attendance. Much of our strength as rescuers is our versatility and adaptability to challenges. I have confidence that we can work through these changes and continue to be a strong and resilient organization. Once again, thank you for what you do for your teams, your patients, and for the MRA.

Alison Sheets

President, Mountain Rescue Association





Members of West Valley Search and Rescue look for actor Julian Sands in June 2023 (WVSAR)

Battling Baldy: Frequent Missions on Popular Mountain

Rick Lindfors - Meridian Editor in Chief

Los Angeles - Just outside the Los Angeles city limits shoots a more than ten-thousand foot peak. Mt. San Antonio, commonly known as Mt. Baldy, is within plain view of the second most populous city in the U.S. and draws hundreds of thousands to its trails in the San Gabriel mountain range. In 2023, the mountain gained national attention after the disappearance and death of a Hollywood actor with SAR coordinators calling on the public to be more careful when venturing out.

Mt. Baldy is a mission-heavy area according to West Valley Search and Rescue commander Eric Vetere. He says while 2023 has been a normal year for their number of callouts, there has been more focus on the mountain after high-profile incidents. "The mountain isn't any more dangerous or busy," he said. "You may have three or four hundred people that go up there on a day [...] and we may not get a call at all. To us it seems like a very dangerous environment but most people are able to navigate it."

The Search and Rescue community in the U.S. is already familiar with Mt. Baldy. In December 2019, WVSAR member Tim Staples was killed in a fall while searching for a missing hiker on the mountain in snowy conditions. The subject of that rescue effort was found deceased months later.

In January 2023, Actor Julian Sands went missing while climbing Mt. Baldy. Sands, 65, was an experienced mountaineer and went missing January 13. Initial search efforts were hampered by severe weather. Sands' remains were discovered by a group of hikers in the Goode Canyon area on the northwest side of the mountain in June. [The hikers who discovered his remains spoke with the Los Angeles Times](#) in August about the haunting experience and warned that people need to be careful on the steep slopes and carry the right equipment for winter ascents. The official cause of Sands' death is still undetermined.

Although Baldy doesn't have a glacier, it still poses a technical climbing challenge in the winter months with heavy snowfall. Climbers need ice axes, crampons and the right boots and need them equipped when ascending. "You come across a lot of people who have an ice axe, have a helmet, have proper crampons and boots but maybe they're not wearing it [...] when something happens it's too late for them," says Vetere. He says SAR teams often encounter people who attempt to put crampons on regular hiking boots or don't have experience with winter climbing equipment. Goode Canyon is a frequent area for

winter rescues. Baldy is also prone to avalanches with 35-45 degree slopes. In the summer, WVSAR frequently deals with hikers who get lost on the slopes.

WVSAR tries to prevent missions from happening through public education events and relationships with hiking groups in their area. WVSAR members will also post at trailheads to interact with people about safety on the mountain. The team is also building displays to educate people on winter climbing equipment. WVSAR also uses its social media profile to promote hiker safety tips and show proper equipment usage. Vetere says San Bernardino County, where WVSAR is based, is also pressing the U.S. Forest Service to become more involved with preventative measures such as safety closures and patrols in the area.



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Juneau Mountain Rescue accepts the Mel Nading Search and Rescue Award in Juneau, Alaska (Juneau Mountain Rescue)

Alaska Team Receives Award for Rescue Cluster

Jackie Ebert, Juneau Mountain Rescue President

This year, Juneau Mountain Rescue received the Mel Nading Search and Rescue Award after a series of missions in the summer of 2022. The award recognizes “exemplary service of ASARA member volunteers performing search and rescue operations either on an individual or team level in difficult, dangerous, or complex situations while going above and beyond the call of duty associated with routine SAR missions.” JMR received the award for its execution of five rescue missions in Juneau, Alaska Between August 1st and August 5th. Four of the operations occurred within the course of 48 hours.

The first mission on August 1st required 15 responders, including a rope team, lasted 7 ½ hours and involved a hypothermic subject with known mental illness and drug abuse. The next mission occurred on August 4th with a 2115 callout for a lost hiker with a sprained ankle, with rescue teams and operations completing the mission at 0300 on August 5th while a weather system moved in. At 0810 on August 5th, JMR received another callout for an overdue hiker that had not returned from a hike at 4,000 feet and had been spotted on the ridge the evening of August 4th with

no shirt and no water. The hiker was stranded on the Mt. Roberts ridge overnight during the weather system that came in, which produced strong winds, heavy rain, and zero visibility.

While JMR was working the Mt. Roberts hiker, the team received an additional mission request for 3 hikers who were lost in the storm and needed assistance at 3,400 feet on Mt. McGinnis. Both the Mt. Roberts and the Mt. McGinnis operations resolved around 1830 with the successful location and extraction of all subjects.

Alaska Search and Rescue Association

Mel Nading Search and Rescue Award

The Mel Nading Search and Rescue Award recognizes the exemplary service of ASARA member volunteers performing search and rescue operations either on an individual or team level in difficult, dangerous, or complex situations while going above and beyond the call of duty associated with routine SAR missions.

On March 30, 2013, late in the evening, Alaska State Troopers Helo-1 went down after successfully rescuing a stranded snowmachiner in the Talkeetna Mountains near Talkeetna, Alaska. Tragically, all aboard were lost: Pilot Mel Nading, Trooper Tage Toll, and the rescued subject.

Mel flew over 3400 hours for the Alaska State Troopers. He was responsible for over 750 rescues and medevacs of lost and missing persons across the state of Alaska and received many awards including the Governor's Denali Peak Performance and a Commendation for Meritorious Services in 2008.

The hearts of those in the SAR community will always be with the Nading family. ASARA's annual award for SAR excellence is given in the spirit of remembrance to Mel Nading's selfless service to the people of Alaska.

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The extreme weather pattern continued through the day and night of August 5th. After debriefing the previous missions, JMR received a call-out request at 2335 to assist the United States Coast Guard with a stranded hunter on Chichagof Island. JMR operation leaders and a virtual planning team stayed up the rest of the night working on the response, extraction and safety plan and assembled gear to support the insertion of two JMR team members into a potential multi-day operation to support the location and retrieval of the subject who was in an extremely remote location on Chichagof Island. The strike team deployed with the USCG, who was ultimately able to hoist the subject from his location during a break in the weather. In total, JMR had 17 responders participate in these five missions, with many of those responders participating in back-to-back missions.

JMR was awarded the Mel Nading award a year later in August 2023 for their efforts during those 48 hours. The team was heralded for their dedication and professionalism through the constant callouts and heavy weather.

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Common Responder Injuries in Mountain Rescue

Chris Peluso, DO, FAWM, DiMM*

Recent studies from outdoor industry analysts show that as much as 80% of outdoor activity categories showed growth in participation in 2022. Likewise, search and rescue teams (mountain teams included) have seen a rise in activations across many of the more heavily trafficked outdoor areas in the United States. With the frequency of callouts and the potential for inadequate rest and recovery of responders, it is important to be aware of injuries that may happen to responders.

TRAINING:

The research that exists for search and rescue operations show that the majority of injuries actually occur in training situations. Trauma of varied quality makes up the majority of injuries suffered, and extrapolation from data in other fields of recreation in similar environments show that lacerations/soft tissue injuries and orthopedic injuries

(including dislocation, fractures, strains and sprains) are the most likely to be experienced. Traumatic head injuries, while not the most common outdoor injury pattern in general but with catastrophic consequences, should still be mitigated by proper personal protective equipment. Training also has the potential to lead to complacency when few injuries have been encountered. This can be especially true when training repetitively in a familiar environment. Fostering a culture of diligence for safety even in training scenarios with a healthy understanding that not all safety concerns can ever be mitigated fully should be the ongoing goal.

FIELD RESPONSE: PRE-INCIDENT ARRIVAL

Around 6,500 accidents involving ambulances occur every year in the US with about 60% happening while in

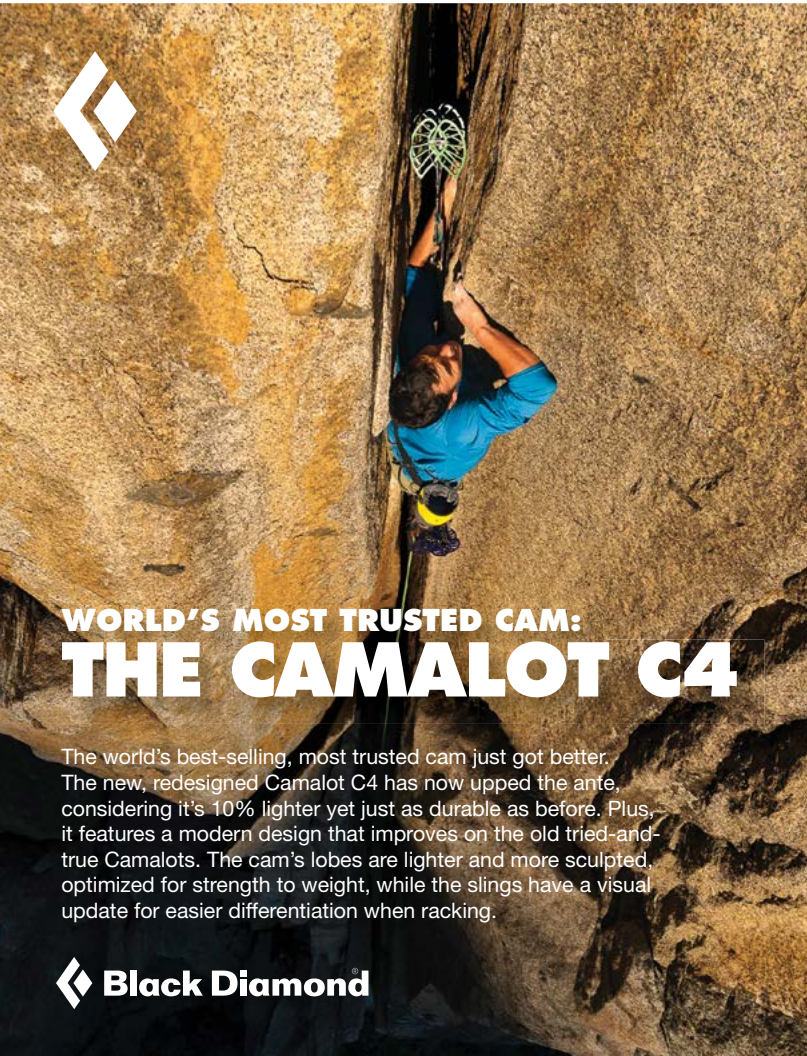
emergency use. Utilizing lights and sirens to get to a scene only saves highly recognizable vehicles like ambulances between 1.7 and 3.6 minutes of response time. With typical response time of several hours for many Mountain SAR teams, using lights and sirens and excessive vehicular speed does not seem to add significantly to the response time but does increase the likelihood of injury from accidents. Slow is smooth. Smooth is fast. Slow is fast.

FIELD RESPONSE: OPERATIONS

Operating in a new or rarely seen environment comes with additional layers of risk such as a lack of knowledge about terrain where more diligence in situational awareness may be demanded in a more fatigued state. There are further injury patterns to be aware of that can be both debilitating and dangerous on field operations. Musculoskeletal and soft tissue trauma like lacerations still rank among the highest likely injuries in the back country for responders, and head trauma is still very much a consideration. Blister care knowledge and supplies become more apparently needed on call outs as there will be less familiar technical

terrain and these events can last significantly longer than training scenarios putting the feet of responders at more risk. Additionally, transportation injuries can certainly be a concern in the backcountry. Use of utility and all-terrain vehicles and even horseback operations provide ample opportunities for crush and rollover injuries. Working in areas of known wildfire potential should also prompt a team to be ready to deal with burn patterns, even envenomation and animal attacks become possibilities, though still rare among injury patterns seen across the backcountry setting.

Animal encounters in general mandate at least an awareness level of how wildlife utilize the area in question and some of their seasonal movement patterns. The potential for these meetings should also have planning in the training arena, but a false sense of complacency even in unfamiliar terrain for a team could make the concept of wildlife awareness even more important. There may be need to pack items like bear spray, as well as have a higher alertness for venomous snakes depending on seasonality and terrain features. Stinging insects account for



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a number of encounters, especially in the Southeast, and anaphylaxis preparedness is a key.


Environmental exposure (heat, cold, wind, rain) can lead to exposure problems such as hypo or hyperthermia. These exposures, along with lack of hydration or nutrition, can lead to fatigue which can compromise decision making and eventually lead to injury. Proper nutrition, hydration and exposure preparedness can help mitigate these problems. Having access to individual medical history including present medications and allergies is vitally important when a teammate is injured in the field. This can be as simple as having medical history info in an IFAK and also located on cellphone along with emergency contacts. Knowing how to access a cellphones' Emergency contacts and info is a skill every rescuer should have.

INDIVIDUAL FIRST AID KIT: RECOMMENDATIONS

Taking into consideration that harm and injury can befall a responder at any point in the response chain, it would be prudent to adjust the first aid items carried by the responder to further assist in mitigation of these harms. There is some variation with environment and terrain, but in general it is beneficial if each member of a response has the proper equipment to assist in their own stabilization and even rescue should it be necessary.

Usually, team members will have an idea of how much they may need in terms of nutrition and hydration, and likely know their local terrain well enough to maintain proper attire and PPE such as ear and eye protection when needed and environmental protection from rain, wind, cold, heat, and low light situations. Addition of a lightweight bivy sack which could be modified into a thermal blanket, a chem light, small packets of energy food and electrolytes. In terms of personal first aid there should be a focus on most likely-to-occur patterns.

First and foremost, every responder should always carry their own prescription medications. Likewise, injectable epinephrine has become quite common even in the non-medical personnel equipment



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list. Injectable epinephrine would be an item of recommendation as it is unlikely that any individual knows fully his or her allergy profile well enough to know they would never have a reaction to anything they encountered. Anaphylaxis is a critical illness with a high mortality potential and a relatively uncomplicated antidote.

Orthopedic equipment such as a folding reinforced splint (think SAM splint[®] or similar) triangle bandage or plan for improvised sling, and elastic athletic bandage would be useful based on the most likely injuries to be suffered from trauma in the backcountry. One should also be able to control massive hemorrhage by including commercial tourniquet options as well as pressure bandage material, wound packing material, sturdy tape, and a cutting utensil. Practice applying these materials to oneself, and a partner is a paramount skillset.

Minor wound care options including assorted waterproof bandage material, blister care options, and over the counter options (if applicable based on medical history and physician consultation prior to operations) for minor pain can be useful. Chewable aspirin is also of high

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importance as medical based injury patterns do include cardiac considerations even in the backcountry responder setting.

If the capacity exists on a team for drone inclusion, then delivery of additional equipment may be a skill to be practiced before needed on an actual event. Lastly, knowing where each responder's personal first aid kit is on their person and having it clearly marked and at the ready will decrease time to care for a responder whether it be self-care or buddy-aided care.

**Atrium Wake Forest Health, Department of Emergency Medicine; Appalachian Mountain Rescue Team, Assistant Chief - North Carolina*



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Letter from the Editor

Another year down and many stories to look back on for MRA teams. I hope all of us are able to look back on the year with lessons learned in missions and training and be proud of what we've accomplished.

One thing to look forward to this coming year is the continued distribution and event planning for the documentary *Where the Rope Ends*. The film follows a Seattle nurse and her healing journey after being rescued by SAR in a canyoneering accident. The project aims to raise money and awareness for volunteer SAR teams with event packages becoming available next year for teams to use in their cities. This is an incredible way to engage our communities for recruiting and fundraising. You can learn more about the documentary on the project <https://www.wheretheropeends.com/>.

There is also change coming: Meridian will be in need of new editorial staff next year. While I have enjoyed being at the helm, I believe the publication of the MRA should be in the hands of someone who is involved in the alpine rescue mission and training sphere. I started doing this as a member of Eugene Mountain Rescue in Oregon, but am now in a K9/water outfit in Minnesota. Meridian is an important tool for the MRA in spreading the word about the incredible work of our volunteers, medical education and generating revenue for the organization. This responsibility includes working with our sales lead, copy editor, MEDCOM lead the president and other MRA members to write stories about MRA teams, edit submissions and approve the assembled copy. If you enjoy SAR and writing, then this is a wonderful outlet.

If you are interested in the position, feel free to reach out to me or MRA president Allison Sheets. I intend to stay on through the summer 2024 issue to ensure an effective transition and time to train in new staff.

Best,

Rick Lindfors

Meridian Editor in Chief

Northstar Search and Rescue



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