

MERIDIAN

Summer 2024



The Quarterly Publication of the Mountain Rescue Association

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Get a Lift:

Team Pulls Boulder off Patient



**SAR Documentary Gains Steam
Researching Volunteer Rescue**



MOUNTAIN RESCUE ASSOCIATION

Summer 2024

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ON THE COVER: A U.S. Navy helicopter hoists a patient after he was pinned underneath a boulder in Inyo County, Calif.

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President’s Message

Dear MRA,

This is my last president’s message. As we move on to the next chapter of our organization, I want to thank all of you for your support over my two-year term. It has been an honor and a privilege to be leading such an amazing group of people. The MRA mission statement: “The Mountain Rescue Association is an organization of teams dedicated to saving lives through rescue and mountain safety education” remains true. But there is more. No one gets into SAR to be part of the administration, let alone work through the legal, financial, and political aspects of functioning as a non-profit in the 21st century. However, this is also part of our responsibility.

Over the next months and years, we will be making changes that are difficult, but also exciting. We have the opportunity to improve the quality, efficiency and currency of our organization. We can create a framework for improved membership engagement and director involvement. All of this to better support you, the rescuers working hard every day to save lives. My last ask is that you get involved in these changes. No single individual chooses the course we take; it is the membership that drives the MRA. If you want change, gather consensus, bring it to a business meeting and hear other ideas. Be open to compromise, take ownership of the organization, and stay active in your region. And as always, thank you for all that you do.

Alison Sheets

President, Mountain Rescue Association

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Rescuers used a lift jack and a rope system to lift a boulder off their patient (Inyo County SAR)

Rigging the Rock: Team Lifts Boulder off Patient

Rick Lindfors-Ackerman - Meridian Editor in Chief

INDEPENDENCE, CALIF - Ingenuity, communication and a bit of automotive know-how all came into play during the rescue of a man in Inyo County, Calif. The man and a friend were hunting for quartz crystals on December 5, 2023 near Crystal Ridge around 7,300 feet. The area is a very popular spot for crystal seekers. The man, Kevin DePaolo, was digging under a large boulder on a steep slope when the ground gave way and the boulder rolled onto his right leg, pinning him into the hillside. Fortunately the group had cell service and they were able to call 911.

One team from Inyo County Search and Rescue drove to the site while another team went by helicopter. According to a volunteer who responded to the mission,

some team members had recently visited the area, making navigation much quicker. The first team reached DePaolo around 1930, more than three hours after the boulder fell on him. In order to get the 6,000-10,000 lb. rock off, rescuers needed to combine push and pull forces. The team brought an off-road jack on the mission knowing that it would be needed to remove the boulder. They also brought a bolting kit consisting of a cordless hammer drill, bolts, a wrench and Yosemite hammer. The jack would lift the boulder while a seven-to-one rope system would pull from the other side. The team drilled anchors into the boulder to clip the rope system and attach a carabiner for the jack to hook onto. They also hammered rocks under

the boulder so it wouldn't budge any further onto their patient. The entire setup took 40 minutes. Once ready, one team member worked the jack and others worked the rope system. They only needed to lift the boulder three inches to free DePaolo and pull him away by his armpits.

DePaolo had serious injuries and pain from the boulder. An EMT on the team had a tourniquet pre-staged before extraction in case of massive hemorrhage. They didn't see serious bleeding on his right leg after pulling him out so they didn't tighten the tourniquet. DePaolo's left thigh and right knee were avulsed and he was in increased pain now that he was no longer compressed between the boulder and the dirt beneath. The team packaged him in a vacuum split and sleeping bags but it did little to ease his pain.

The team now needed to get DePaolo off the mountain. The police helicopter that brought in one of the teams couldn't hoist at night, so a SAR coordinator called for a U.S. Navy medevac from air station Lemoore. The chopper flew in around midnight and hovered for about 50 minutes in order to burn off fuel to make the appropriate weight needed to be able to hoist DePaolo to safety. The SAR team EMT stayed with the patient the entire time until handing him off to the Navy medic for the flight to Fresno.

Days later, the team learned the full extent of DePaolo's injuries. One of his femoral arteries had ruptured but had been pinned shut and clotted from the pressure from the boulder. His pelvis was also broken in two places. The



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volunteer on the mission says they suspected a potential pelvic injury due to not being able to ease his pain in the vacuum splint, but couldn't confirm the injury in the field. The artery injury came as a total surprise. DePaolo said in an [interview](#) that the pelvis injury wasn't surprising but the artery rupture was a shock. He expressed admiration and thanks for the SAR volunteers and medical staff that saved him. "These [volunteers] could have just been eating dinner [when getting the callout], I kept thinking about that," he said. "Saving people's lives is probably one of the most impactful things you can do."

Documentary Spreads Awareness for SAR

Rick Lindfors-Ackerman - Meridian Editor in Chief

A documentary film with the mission to raise awareness and support for search and rescue is gaining acclaim and popularity. “Where the Rope Ends” tells the story of Nichole Doane, a Seattle nurse who was rescued by SAR after a canyoneering accident in 2017. Doane was seriously injured in the fall and faced a tough road to recovery filled with pain, surgeries and mental and emotional stress.

The finished documentary is making the rounds at film festivals and is also available for search and rescue teams to use as a fundraising tool. The film won best documentary at the Poppy Jasper International Film Festival in April. “It’s been great to see the outpouring of support,” Doane said. Director Baylee Sinner has been on tour for festivals while Doane has been attending showings for search and rescue teams. The film crew developed tools and event packaging plans for teams to use and hosts question and answer sessions on their youtube channel. “We’ve designed a whole package of information,” Doane said. “We’ve had lots of expert speakers [covering] social media, how to approach major corporations, all kinds of things.” Doane says the film has helped many donors realize the volunteer nature of SAR and commit to supporting teams.

Just like search and rescue, the documentary happened with the help of dedicated production volunteers. Doane estimates more than five years of filming was done by volunteers. “We didn’t have any problems at all getting people to volunteer for this project. They just felt like it was such a good cause and such a great story that they wanted to be involved in it.” Doane adds that staff were paid towards the end of the project in order to meet certain deadlines.

The film has also been a major part of Doane’s recovery. “I think that everyone wants to believe that you can find a silver lining in every challenging aspect of life,” said Doane. She feels much stronger through her recovery and that the process has helped her build a more resilient mindset for overcoming obstacles, including those



Nichole Doane



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faced by healthcare workers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Doane was able to reconnect with SAR team members who saved her and work them into the documentary. Getting them involved wasn't easy at first but Doane says the finished project has made them proud. The film team did test screenings with SAR teams throughout the production process and worked the feedback into the final product. While "Where the Rope Ends" features helicopter rescue and rope work, the film can be used by SAR teams of any specialty. "This project is supposed to be a conversation starter. It's a place to get the audience emotionally engaged in the mission of search and rescue and then hopefully organizations can make it more specific to their cause," said Doane, noting that K9 teams

have been able to use the film at events.

Interested teams can learn more about the documentary on the film's [website](#). The project [youtube channel](#) features question and answer sessions with Doane and Sinner as well as behind-the-scenes and promotional materials.



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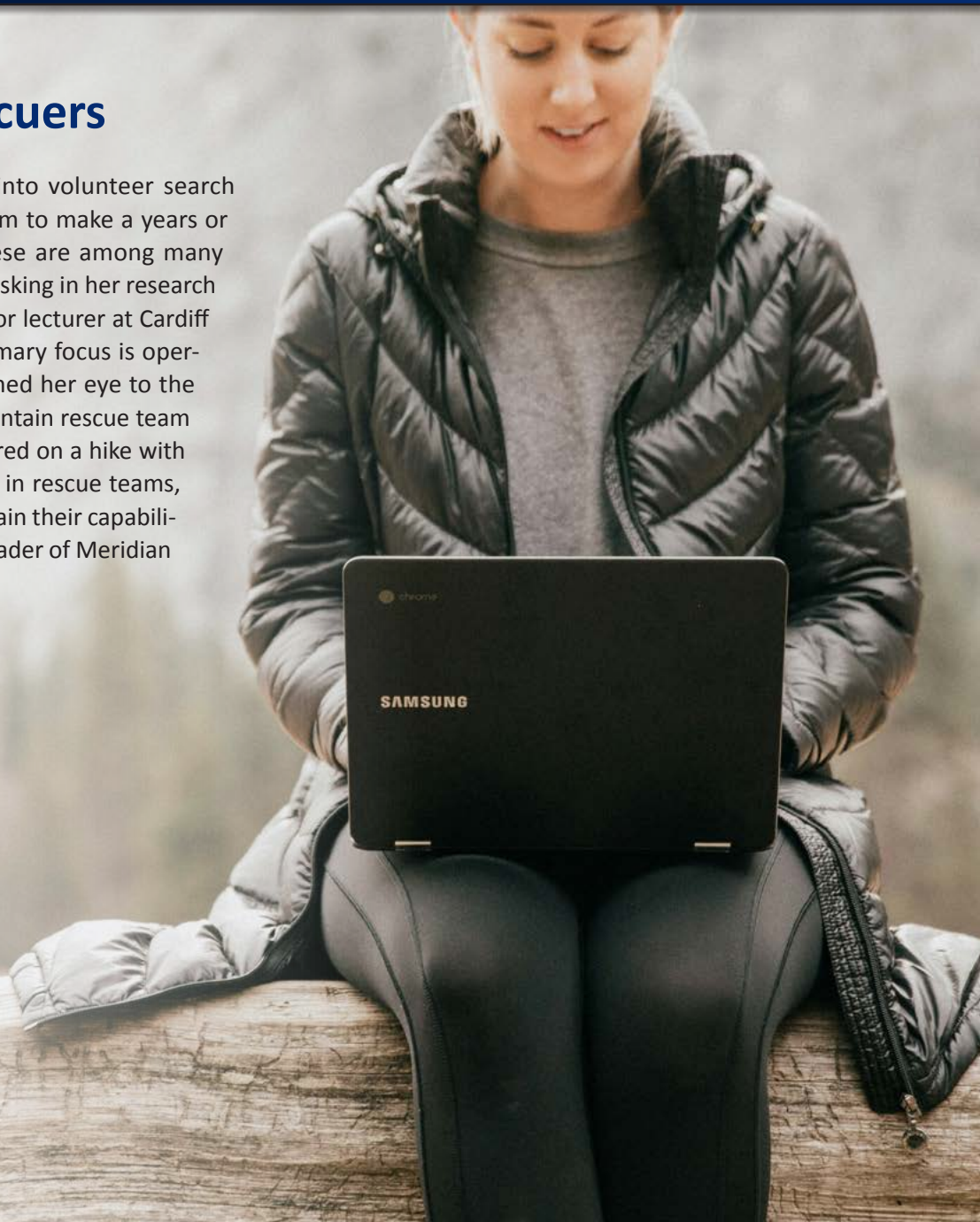
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Researching Rescuers

What inspires someone to get into volunteer search and rescue? What motivates them to make a years or decades-long commitment? These are among many questions that Dr. Yuan Huang is asking in her research of volunteer SAR. Huang is a senior lecturer at Cardiff University in Wales, U.K. Her primary focus is operations management and has turned her eye to the rescue world. In 2021, a U.K. mountain rescue team rescued Huang after she was injured on a hike with her dog. This inspired an interest in rescue teams, how they work and how they sustain their capabilities over time. Huang is an avid reader of Meridian



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and is looking for MRA volunteers to interview about how they got into SAR, their experiences with their teams and what makes a high-performing, sustainable team. Questions for interviewees include but are not limited to:

- What kinds of resources are needed for mountain rescue teams?
- How do you feel after different missions?
- What keeps you involved in SAR?

Huang’s goal with this is to work her findings into her lectures on operations management as well as share stories in academic newsletters. She is working with both U.S. and U.K. - based teams for her project.

Interested persons can reach out directly by email to HuangY66@cardiff.ac.uk



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Studying Medical Treatment in Rescues

Bill M Campbell MD FAWM DiMM, MRA MedCom Chair

In Mountain Rescue we are often called to search for a missing person. Searching is a skill that is learned and also perishable if not used or practiced. But once we find the person we are looking for, what then? Some in the SAR community feel very strongly that searchers should also be able to rescue the person they find. LAST is an acronym we use: Locate, Access, Stabilize and Transport. Search involves locating. Rescue involves the rest. Stabilization involves medical treatment, from simple first aid to advanced life support.

Given these premises, the MRA MedCom would like to undertake a study of what and how our MRA teams provide medical care to the subjects we rescue, and we also want to provide resources for best practices in wilderness medicine and prolonged field care. Our MedCom members are also members within the Wilderness Medical Society and Special Operations Medical Association, two of the leading organizations in the field of austere medical

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care. We strive to pass on lessons learned and clinical practice guidelines to our fellow MRA members and also to work with teams when they have questions.

To start the process of passing along information I want to emphasize a medical problem within SAR that quite often is ignored or handled slowly that can contribute significantly to morbidity and mortality in trauma victims: Hypothermia. Keep your victim warm. We should all have items in our pack to immediately begin treatment for hypothermia. These include insulation from the ground, a vapor barrier and some heat source (like ReadyHeat 2 Torso). This is a great start until more resources can reach the patient. The EMS acronym MARCH (Massive Bleeding, Airway, Respirations, Circulation, Head and Hypothermia) includes Hypothermia at the end, but given the importance of hypothermia, some are advocating for HMARCH so Hypothermia is at the beginning.

For an in-depth look at accidental hypothermia, go to the Wilderness [Medical Society Clinical Practice Guidelines](#) from 2019 (which includes a simple 'Cold Care' you can print off).

Watch for the questionnaire, please answer it, and keep your patients warm.

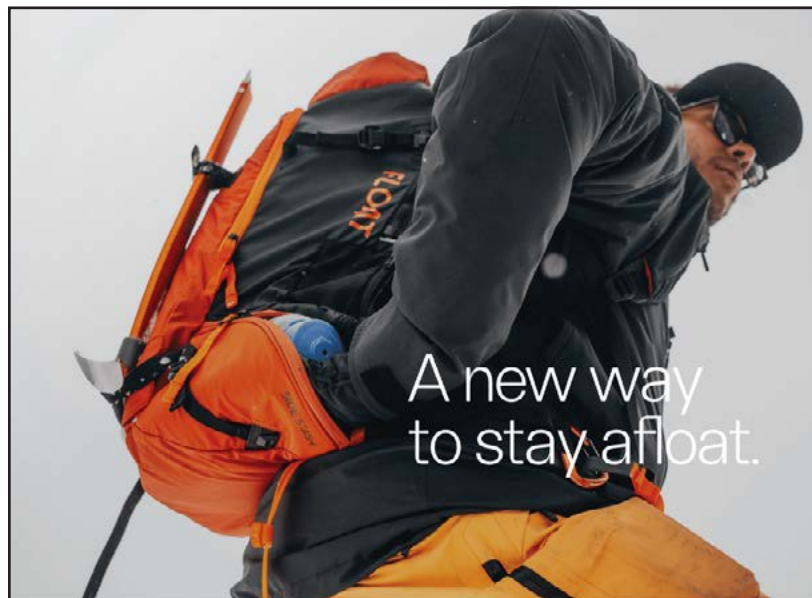


Letter from the Editor

Once again I'd like to thank you for downloading and reading this issue of Meridian and hopefully enjoying the stories and contributions of MRA team members. We are used to downloading this as a file but we've recently taken a big step: Meridian is available as a dedicated web page on the Mountain Rescue Association site, allowing easier viewing of older content and content sharing. The MRA web team has been hard at work on this project and have done a wonderful job stocking the new library of stories and committee reports.

This issue also marks the end of my time as editor in chief of Meridian. I started my EIC role in the summer of 2020 while working a day job as a TV news producer and volunteering with Eugene Mountain Rescue in Oregon. I am no longer in an MRA team due to my move to Minnesota, where mountains are few and far between. The MRA and its teams are best served by someone who is still an active member of the organization and the specialized missions and training involved.

The best part of this gig is interacting with people on both the rescue and rescuee side of missions. The MRA is full of courageous and ingenious people who answer the call for help and many times come



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up with incredibly creative ways to locate and extract someone in peril. I am grateful for the time that I've been able to spend talking to MRA team members and partner agencies about their mission experience and getting to work on the future of this publication. Much of my time now outside of my day job is now dedicated to K9 and water SAR with my two dogs as well as being a snowboard instructor in the winter.

Meridian now transfers to the very capable hands of Molly Williams, pictured above, is a Marin County, Calif. SAR volunteer whose editorial experience includes Bloomberg News and the Wall Street Journal. Her credentials definitely outweigh the experience I had when I started in this position. I will still contribute stories here and there. Though I am no longer an MRA member, it is an organization that I believe in and will gladly assist.

Cheers,

Rick Lindfors

Meridian Editor in Chief
Northstar Search and Rescue



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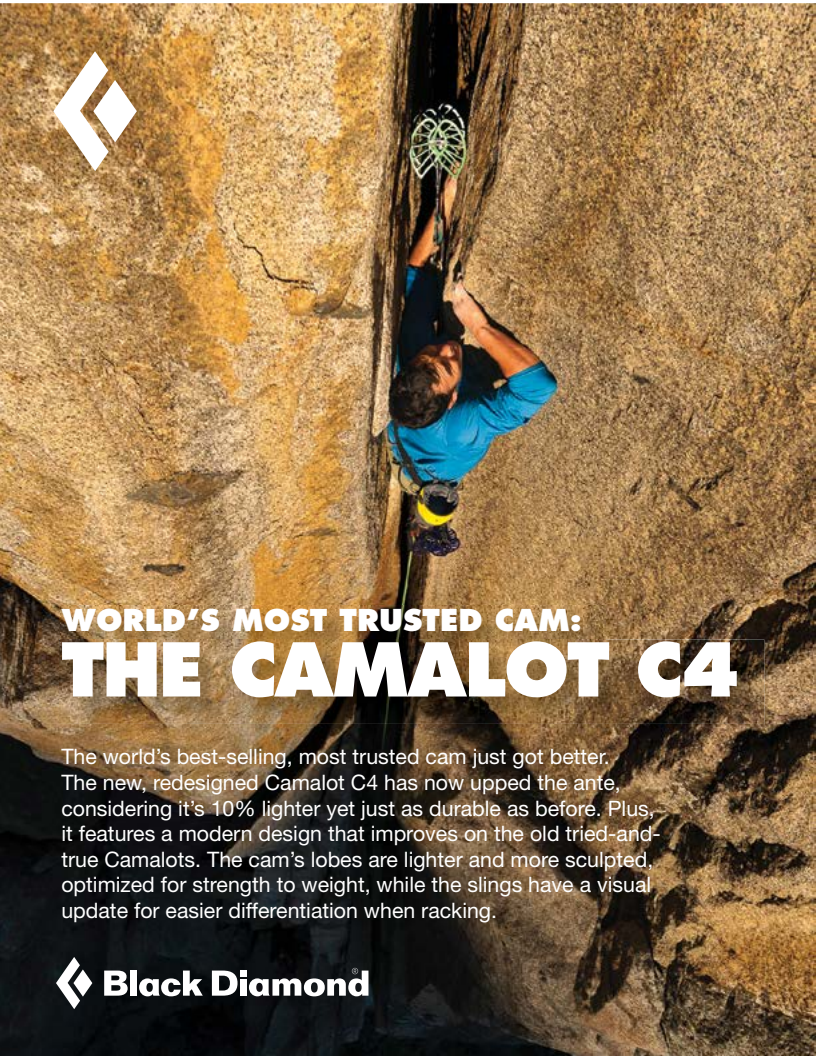
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