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Accidents

THE 2011–2012 WINTER SEASON WAS YET ANOTHER POOR EXCUSE for a classic New England winter. This affected search-and-rescue operations in the White Mountains of New Hampshire. In every month between November 2011 and April 2012, the Mount Washington Observatory recorded below-average precipitation and above-average temperatures. The winter, by most accounts, never even arrived until April. March was by far the most extreme departure from the norm with the average temperature a whopping 9.3 degrees Fahrenheit above normal and the total melted precipitation 5.83 inches below the long-term average. Five times during March, temperatures exceeded previous highs. April was the closest to “normal” conditions and marked the change of the weather pattern with record-breaking low temperatures.

The Mount Washington Avalanche Center didn’t issue its first daily avalanche advisory for the season until January 5. It was mid-January before the observatory completed its first top-to-bottom trip on the Mount Washington Auto Road via the motorized vehicle called the Snow Cat. These conditions allowed more snow-free hiking than at any time in recent memory. The weather was often more forgiving than usual, and deep snow stymied fewer hikers. New Hampshire Fish and Game officers responded to only 60 search-and-rescue incidents during the first two fiscal periods covering most of last winter.

The debate in New Hampshire’s legislature about how to pay for searches and rescues continued. For the first time, lawmakers allocated \$50,000 of the general fund to these incidents.

Two people died hiking on Mount Washington. The unusual weather conditions can be considered contributing factors for both incidents, the first because a falling hiker hit rocks that are usually buried in the floor of Tuckerman Ravine, and the second because the March melt created unique crevasse hazards in the same ravine. Details on both incidents appear later.

Several noteworthy changes occurred within the White Mountain search-and-rescue community. Lieutenant Jim Goss became the leader of NHFG’s Specialized Search and Rescue Team when Todd Bogardus retired after many years of service. Goss will lead the team of sixteen trained conservation

officers who respond to a wide variety of incidents around the state. The New Hampshire Army National Guard 238th Medevac Company received the New Hampshire Congressional Law Enforcement Award for its rescue of two hikers on Franconia Ridge back on February 11, 2008. A new group, the Mount Washington Valley Swift Water Rescue Team, formed to assist with water-based rescues, filling a serious void. Finally, the community mourned the passing of Nancy Lyon, president and operational leader of New England K-9 Search and Rescue. Lyon epitomized the dedication of the volunteers who play a critical role under the command of NHFG. She spent 23 years with her team, assisted on countless searches, and probably was the person least likely to miss the monthly meeting of the White Mountain Search and Rescue Working Group. She will be sadly missed.

Equipment Failure

Evan E., age 24, of Buxton, Maine, set out for an overnight trip on the Franconia Ridge on Friday, February 3, 2012. He had researched his route and made a backup plan just in case the weather went foul or he was moving slowly. As an experienced winter hiker, he'd spent time in both the Adirondacks and the White Mountains in winter and knew which equipment to take. He created a detailed itinerary for his adventure and left it with his family.

At first, everything seemed to go as planned. The travel wasn't too difficult and the weather was reasonable. The morning was sunny with scattered high clouds. He made good time on his ascent of Mount Lafayette, at 5,260 feet the sixth-highest peak in New Hampshire, but he broke a snowshoe. That slowed him down but didn't seem like a deal-breaker. Evan figured that the going should be easier when he reached the windswept area above treeline where he'd probably trade his snowshoes for crampons. The forecast for the higher summits called for increasing clouds in the afternoon with snow that would be measured by tenths of an inch. He decided to keep going.

After summiting Lafayette, Evan headed south on the exposed ridge toward Mount Lincoln. The wind had picked up, but the trail covers a mere mile between the two summits, and it wasn't much past noon. Evan planned to continue on the exposed ridge past Lincoln, over Little Haystack, and then descend on the Liberty Spring Trail to the west. He would spend the night at Liberty Spring Tentsite not far below treeline. His Plan B was to go only as far as Little Haystack and then descend the Falling Waters Trail. It was a significantly shorter route than his primary plan, but as one of the most

popular loops in the White Mountains, it offered a consolation prize that he could easily embrace.

Before long, conditions on the ridge began to deteriorate. Without trees or topography to shield him, Evan felt the full force of the elements. The wind picked up out of the northwest, and Evan tried hard to stay on the trail. Eventually he decided to descend to the ridge's lee side, thinking this would provide better walking. He was wrong. Deep snowdrifts slowed him to a crawl, and he battled for every inch of forward progress. He labored until exhausted and was soon overcome by a sense that he had pushed himself into a position that he couldn't escape.

Evan hunkered down and contemplated using the personal locator beacon that he carried. Instead, he turned on his cell phone and realized that he had adequate service to make a call. With much anxiety, Evan called his father to tell him of his predicament. His father called NHFG (using the number Evan had listed in the trip itinerary). Then NHFG conservation officer Kevin Jordan called Evan directly. By now it was about 2:45 P.M. Evan's voice was riddled with anxiety when the two connected, and he stated quite clearly, "I need help." He was mentally and physically exhausted by breaking trail in snow that he described as being over his head. He asked if a helicopter could retrieve him because he was getting cold and a storm was moving in from Lafayette. He told Jordan that he doubted that he would make it if he didn't get help. The officer said a helicopter was very unlikely in the current conditions but that he'd work on getting rescuers to Evan.

On the phone Evan had given global positioning system coordinates of his location, but Jordan checked a map and realized that the coordinates must be wrong because, even though Evan had explained he was on the Franconia Ridge, the GPS numbers pointed to the other side of Interstate 93. Jordan told Evan to get in his sleeping bag and call 911 directly so that the emergency system could plot his location from his phone's location. Those coordinates showed that Evan was indeed on the Franconia Ridge, just 0.2 mile north of Mount Lincoln, still short of his Plan B bailout route. He was told to stay put. Evan dug a hole in the snow to escape the wind, crawled inside his sleeping bag, and waited.

NHFG conservation officers Brad Morse and Heidi Murphy went up the Falling Waters Trail to the summit of Little Haystack and then headed north toward Lincoln with an extra pair of snowshoes. Shortly before 9 P.M., they called Evan, asking him to blow his emergency whistle every few minutes and wave his flashlight. At approximately 9:10 P.M., they located him 200 feet off

the Franconia Ridge Trail. The officers packed a pathway in the deep snow back up to the trail, gave Evan a pair of working snowshoes, and led him down the Falling Waters Trail, reaching the trailhead at midnight.

Comment: Evan carried the right equipment, he researched his route, and he checked the weather. He seemed to have done everything right, so how did things go wrong? The answer is not straightforward, but in this case, it relates to his hiking alone and the way he made decisions. When Evan broke his snowshoe, he figured that the ridge would be windswept enough that he wouldn't need it later on. A partner might have asked, "What if it's not as windswept as you're hoping? What about the three miles when we head down from the ridge?"

A good partner will call you out when you're falling into the mental traps that can harbor bad decision making. As a survival mechanism, humans have evolved to be able to make quick decisions even when we're missing information or we don't have time to process it all. Sometimes quick thinking is critical, and there is no room for analysis paralysis. Other times, our decisions are made by mental shortcuts or heuristics. "I've done this a hundred times before, so it will be fine," is a common heuristic trap where people become complacent and don't assess the conditions as they should. Another is to base decisions on just the information that supports your choice, paying little attention to anything contradictory. This is the tragic flaw of the optimist. Telling myself that it's going to get better if I can just suffer through this little bit is how I've done some of my best work painting myself into a corner.

Would a more thorough evaluation of his gear beforehand have brought to light the imminent failure of his snowshoes? It's possible, but we can't know for sure. How often do we go through all of our hiking gear in such painstaking detail? Experience tells us that things do break and usually it happens at the worst time possible. Before I go on such trips, I check those items on which my life depends: stove, headlamp, cell phone, and, if I'm going near avalanche-prone terrain, an avalanche beacon.

When I'm climbing with ropes on rock and ice, I do check all of my gear, so why not the same level of attention with all of my hiking equipment? When I'm on foot, I know I can easily improvise as situations demand it. Improvisation is a critical skill for a long and enjoyable life full of mountain adventures.

I had a snowshoe catastrophe similar to Evan's a number of years ago. I was guiding a group on a winter traverse of the Mahoosuc Range, a daunting

objective. It wasn't my idea but my boss's and he was going to be the second guide, so I asked myself, "What better adventure could you possibly get paid for?" Late on day two, I was breaking trail, when I slid down a steep granite slab covered by a dusting of snow. I stayed on my feet until near the bottom, when I unexpectedly went snowshoes over teakettle. I stood up, brushed the snow from my face, and quickly realized that I had ripped the binding clear off the snowshoe. Luckily, we were close to Carlo Col, our camp for the night, and the snow was manageable if you weren't breaking trail. That night, I spent half an hour reattaching the bindings with a length of cord I had stashed in my pack. Knowing that it would see some serious abrasion, I covered the vulnerable layers with a few wraps of duct tape that I had stored on my hiking pole. Presto! I now had snowshoe bindings that were probably stronger than the original equipment. In fact, I used them for several more close-to-the-road outings.

Of course, I had help from my partners. When my snowshoe broke, I moved to the back of the line and let others break trail. Hiking alone, Evan had no such option. A partner also could have helped fix a broken snowshoe or might have insisted they throw in the towel when the snowshoe broke. A partner might have convinced Evan to make camp in the place he waited for more than six hours. I enjoy a good solo hike as much as the next guy, but I recognize that when doing so I expose myself to a greater degree of risk.

Caught in a Dog Fight

On Sunday, March 11, 2012, Pat M. took her 6-year-old golden retriever, Dory, for a walk to enjoy the springtime sun and rising temperatures. She chose Town Hall Road, an unplowed seasonal road in Intervale, New Hampshire, which eventually turns into the Slippery Brook Trail. The area is popular year-round, providing access to Mountain Pond, the East Branch of the Saco River, and some pleasant trails and dirt roads. In the winter, the hikers are joined by cross-country skiers, snowmobilers, and the occasional dogsled team.

Pat began her walk from the end of the plowed road where a couple of cars were parked along with a truck outfitted with sled dog kennels on the back. She recognized the vehicle from the year before, when she'd seen the musher running his dogs while she was hiking with a friend and his two dogs. She knew there would be a sled dog team on the road somewhere and was looking

forward to seeing them. Mushing is a rare but growing activity in the White Mountains, and the sight of a team rushing by is something to behold.

Snowmobile traffic had packed the snow on the road, but the edges were untracked, soft, and knee-deep to a human. Pat and Dory started their walk at around 8:00 A.M. and covered about a mile before turning around above the East Branch Trail junction to hike back out. Pat heard the dog team coming behind them, and she grabbed Dory's collar and stepped off the road into the deep snow on the downhill side of the road to let the team pass.

Standing off the road and holding the dog's collar, she listened as the musher shouted commands at his dogs trying to keep them headed downhill and away from the distraction that she and Dory presented. The lead dogs passed by, but an instant later, all seven of the dogs turned around and went straight for Dory. In a tangled mess of teeth and fur, the dogs dragged Dory onto the road. Pat battled her way out of the deep snow and again grabbed Dory's collar, trying to pull her out of the fray. In the melee, Dory bit Pat's hands several times while trying to defend herself from the other dogs.

Scott I., the musher, finally managed to pull the team back a few feet. Pat pulled Dory farther away. She lay on top of her dog. Blood covered her hands and the nearby snow. As soon as she could, Pat got to her feet and started quickly walking down the road, leaving Scott and his team behind. Her hands were bruised, bleeding, and swelling fast. She didn't have a first aid kit but used her coat as a sling to keep the hand with greater damage elevated to control the bleeding. It took them an hour to walk back to the car. Several snowmobilers going in the opposite direction slowed down to pass, but they didn't stop, and Pat pushed on. Halfway out, Pat was able to reach a friend on her cell phone. Her friend met her in the parking lot with members of the Jackson Fire Department, and they bandaged her wounds and looked over Dory. Scott came out of the trail with his team about ten minutes later and came to see how they were.

Pat went to Memorial Hospital in North Conway, where she was treated for the multiple cuts on her hands. She left with eight stitches and lasting nerve damage in one finger. Dory was basically fine, the thick coat on her rear end saving her from being badly bitten.

Comment: I believe that the main problems here were Scott's inability to control his animals, and Pat's decision to grab Dory's collar during the fight, but let me explain. When entering the White Mountain National Forest, some of the welcome signs call the area "the land of many uses." Most people

understand this to mean that timber harvests are allowed in national forests, but the designation covers many recreational uses that aren't typically allowed in national parks: snowmobiling, hunting, mountain biking, and hobby mineral collecting. With all of this fun, conflicts can arise. In some areas, these conflicts have required very restrictive management. For example, the highly scenic Tahoe Rim Trail in California attracts hikers, mountain bikers, and equestrians. The three groups have had enough problems that bikes are allowed on some sections on alternating days only. Other sections are limited only to hiking traffic.

The WMNF has successfully managed potential conflicts between user groups so that most areas are open to all types of public use unless prohibited by federal law (such as biking on the Appalachian Trail). I believe that the key to success is how people act. Respect and courtesy no matter what your activity should be the norm. Be mindful of how your activity will affect others.

When Scott selected his route for the day, he contemplated using the unplowed Bear Notch Road, but past experience had made him feel that the heavy snowmobile traffic would make it difficult to be safe and have fun with his team. He decided to go to Town Hall Road, where the chance of running into snowmobiles, hikers, and skiers was possible but far less likely. Pat, meanwhile, showed respect for the dog team by stepping off the side of the trail and giving them the right of way. After her accident, when Pat was walking out, the snowmobilers showed respect by slowing down, though it is unclear why they didn't stop to see if she was OK. It is possible that they didn't see her injuries. She did not try to flag them down for assistance.

With all this in mind, the main factor that I believe caused this incident was Scott's inability to control his animals. Granted, it is difficult enough to control a single dog. It's hard to imagine what it must be like to create order and obedience from seven sled dogs that are closer to their wild origins. But that is the responsibility of a dog owner in public. Many municipalities have leash laws, but the WMNF requires leashes only in developed sites such as roadside campgrounds and picnic areas. In other areas, pets must be under control at all times. This may mean a leash or voice control depending on the relationship between the dog and its owner.

(Pet policies are different in national parks, where dogs generally are limited to certain trails, parking lots, cars, or within 100 feet of the road. They must be on a 6-foot or shorter leash at all times.)

I sometimes take my dog, Swami, out on the trails. If I expect it to be busy where I'm going, the pooch stays behind or remains on a leash. It's not because I don't trust her but because there's far too great a chance that we'll encounter an aggressive unleashed dog or someone who is petrified of dogs. I also know that Swami isn't good around skis (possibly because of the herding genes in her mixed-breed background) and that when skiers come along, I no longer have voice control. Our winter hiking options are limited to using a leash for the entire hike or going to the places where I'm confident we won't see anyone skiing. I'd be lying if I said that I knew how my dog would act 100 percent of the time. I'd also be mistaken if I said that I always know where people won't ski. But I do my best with that.

Last, if you ever are witness to a dogfight, think twice before stepping in. The key is avoiding conflict. If you can separate the dogs before they get physical, everyone will be much better off. A stern "No!" may work when they're still snarling at each other, but once they start biting, words have little effect. Grabbing a collar is generally people's natural reaction, but it is almost always how people are bitten trying to break up a fight. Recently, I was in an emergency room (not for me luckily!) when a man came in who, like Pat, had been bitten by the family dog when he tried to restrain it during a fight. When dogs fight, they are completely in survival mode and don't have time to process all of the information; they react quickly rather than question who might be grabbing their collar. Many mushers swear by feet rather than hands because you at least have the protection of a boot, but bites on the lower leg are also common. Others insist that grabbing a dog by its rear legs and pulling them up and back is the way to go. I personally don't want to get my face down any closer to two brawling dogs than I have to. I recommend you don't either.

Lost Beneath the Snow

On April 1, 2012, Norman P., age 67, of Boston, started hiking up Mount Washington with his son, Seth, and two others. The father and son were accomplished hikers, and they climbed Washington each year. They ascended via the Lion Head Trail, but when they reached the summit cone, they decided that it was getting late and that they ought to turn around. Instead of retracing their route, they decided to descend the Tuckerman Ravine Trail. Little snow had fallen that year, but the trail still was completely buried (as is customary for April).

The snow was hard and icy, and they moved very slowly as they tried to navigate their way down the Lip, a convexity (often called a rollover) at the top of the ravine in an area that approaches a 45-degree slope. No one in the group was wearing winter mountaineering boots, and only Norman wore crampons. They all had ski poles, though no one was carrying an ice ax to arrest a sliding fall. At approximately 3:45 P.M., when Seth was approximately 40 feet lower than his father, Norman fell and began sliding downhill, rapidly gathering speed. He didn't appear to be trying to stop his slide, and it is possible that he was knocked unconscious when he initially fell. Seth tried to stop his father as he went sliding by, but he lost his own footing and also began to slide down the slope. Norman slid right into an open crevasse as Seth slid beside it.

Seth and the other group members went to the edge of the crevasse and shouted to Norman but got no response. They threw jackets and headlamps into the hole in the hope that he was alive deep under the snowpack. One member of the group quickly descended to Hermit Lake along with a bystander to summon help.

U.S. Forest Service snow rangers were notified at 4 P.M. and began traveling to Pinkham Notch. Meanwhile, the Appalachian Mountain Club caretaker at Hermit Lake hiked to the ravine to gather information and haul up some of the equipment that would be necessary for the rescue. Additional help was requested from Mountain Rescue Service and Androscoggin Valley Search and Rescue, and the caretaker from the Harvard Mountaineering Club cabin, the AMC, and the Mount Washington Observatory provided other organizational support.

Once the snow rangers were on the scene, they established snow anchors and lowered one of the rangers into the crevasse. He was 40 feet below the opening when he called that he could go no farther. The crevasse narrowed to a small tunnel and the potential for collapse made further descent too risky. He could see another 40 feet down the slot and Norman was nowhere in sight. Shouts into the icy depths went unreturned. The other rescuers raised the snow ranger back to the surface. Darkness and the magnitude of the hazards forced the search to be suspended for the evening. They returned first thing in the morning, but again the decision was made not to go into the hazardous crevasse.

Over the next couple of weeks, the snow rangers monitored conditions and visually inspected the crevasse, but further descents posed too many risks for a recovery. On May 20, the snow rangers were able to get under the

snowpack via a hole that had opened farther downslope. From this access point, they could see Norman's body located 90 feet farther in. That night, they formulated a plan, and the following morning when the snowpack was least likely to collapse, they were able to climb underneath the snow and recover the body approximately 125 feet below the opening through which Norman had fallen.

Comment: On the day of the accident, two snow rangers climbed around the ravine assessing the magnitude of the crevasse hazard. They used avalanche probes to investigate the extent of the crevassing, which often extends beyond the visible opening. Numerous crevasses existed that day, and the pair used roped techniques to assess the holes with a reasonable margin of safety. In addition to the crevasses, the snow conditions were extremely icy, making crampons and ice axes necessary equipment. These conditions had been forecast in the avalanche advisory for Tuckerman Ravine posted at 8:15 A.M. the day of the accident. It read:

With the frozen surfaces comes the potential for very dangerous sliding falls. Every year we see numerous people climbing very steep and icy slopes (e.g., the Lip) without an ice axe and crampons . . . even very experienced mountaineers with all the right equipment would still have a very difficult time self-arresting under the current conditions on some slopes in Tuckerman, so play it safe.

Crampons and an ice ax should be used in any terrain where a long sliding fall is possible or when significant hazards such as cliffs or other hazards loom below your route. When the conditions are as they were, these tools add a certain margin of safety, but they are not a magic bullet. Another basic tenet of travel in steep terrain was discussed in the same day's advisory:

Climb up what you plan to descend. This gives you an opportunity to check for hazards such as crevasses at a leisurely pace.

It is unlikely that the group was aware of the magnitude of the crevasses below them or that the snow was so icy throughout the ravine. If they were, it is unlikely that they would have chosen this route. Conditions can change rapidly, but that day they were fairly constant. Norman and Seth had been to Tuckerman Ravine many times, but their assessment of the hazards was

largely tainted by previous trips with more forgiving conditions when they skied the Bowl after accessing it from the bottom.

Within days of the accident, new snow had partially obscured the crevasse into which Norman had fallen. One skier came down through the Lip and came within a yard of the hole. When a snow ranger spoke with him after his descent, he said that he had no idea his route was hazardous beyond the obvious steepness.

A Warning Ignored

Norman was the second fatality of the 2012 winter season in Tuckerman Ravine. Patrick P., age 46, of Mansfield, Massachusetts, successfully climbed to the summit via Lion Head on Monday, January 9, 2012. At 1:30 P.M. on the summit, he spoke with another hiker, who tried to convince him not to descend through the ravine. Patrick was unprepared for winter conditions in the mountains. He wore a nylon windbreaker over a cotton sweatshirt. He also had no ice ax and wore lightweight traction footwear rather than standard crampons. The concerned hiker loaned him sunglasses, food, and a hiking pole, hoping that he would be better prepared for whatever route he ultimately chose. When Patrick failed to show up at the Pinkham Notch Visitor Center after sundown, the hiker went to the information desk and expressed his concern. When he hadn't shown up an hour later, the man decided to start up the trail looking for him.

At approximately 8:30 P.M., the AMC caretaker at Hermit Lake spotted a light traversing back and forth above the Lip. The light soon fell rapidly from its position straight down the headwall and out of sight. The caretaker immediately notified the snow rangers and began the hike up to the floor of the ravine. There, he found a badly injured Patrick, who died as rescuers were preparing for the evacuation.

Comment: Like Norman, Patrick lacked some of the equipment considered standard in steep snow-covered terrain. And, like Norman, he chose to descend a different route than he had come up. Although the other hiker had warned Patrick, he didn't know the nature of the hazards below him. These contributing factors may have not been the direct cause of either accident, but they are important considerations for any winter traveler. The two tragedies mirror numerous past fatalities on the mountain, and I hope that future visitors will learn from these heartbreaking events.

A Sound Sleeper

On Monday, April 16, 2012, Dylan J., 20, of Littleton, New Hampshire, set out from the Lafayette Campground in Franconia Notch at about 1:00 P.M. to hike along the Kinsman Ridge Trail to Route 112 in Woodstock, more than fifteen miles away. Dylan used his cell phone to stay in contact with his mother who was planning to pick him up at the Kinsman Notch trailhead.

At about 7 P.M., Dylan lost contact with his mother. His last known location was approximately five miles from the trailhead. A half-hour of daylight remained, and he carried no headlamp or flashlight. When he didn't arrive at the designated time, Dylan's mother called friends and family, and they started up the trail searching for the young man. They could not find him, and at 11 P.M., she notified NHFG.

The weather was not expected to be severe and in most similar situations, NHFG would likely wait until morning to initiate a search. But Kinsman Notch is not as popular a route as those to the east, the terrain is certainly rugged, and rescuers worried that Dylan might get seriously injured trying to find his way without a light through the steep and ledgy terrain. Conservation officers from NHFG received assistance from the AMC and Pemigewasset Valley Search and Rescue Team as they began their search at 1:00 A.M. By daybreak, they had yet to find the young man.

The incident commander from NHFG requested more resources, and additional conservation officers headed to the scene along with numerous volunteers. As the teams received their assignments and began to head out for the day, Dylan walked out of the woods with only a few abrasions. After it got dark, Dylan had found a dry spot off the trail and gone to sleep. From his description of the site, it is quite possible that searchers passed close by, shouting and whistling, while Dylan slept.

Comment: The hike that Dylan chose is usually completed over multiple days. Although a fit hiker can cover that route in one day, the AMC *White Mountain Guide* estimates an average time of more than ten hours. Doing some elementary math, a starting time of 1 P.M. would have him reaching the Kinsman Notch trailhead at 11 P.M. Dylan carried no light source, nor did he have a map or any warm clothing. He lacked essential gear and did not allow enough time to complete his hike even if he traveled at a faster than average speed.

Cases like this one required the State of New Hampshire to institute the negligent hiker law. Off-duty conservation officers left their homes to search

for Dylan late at night and were paid overtime rates. Whatever they planned to do the following day was shot after spending a night searching for someone who could have avoided his predicament with a little planning. Even though the hiker found his way out, the search initiated by his mother consumed funds from NHFG's limited search-and-rescue budget. At the time of this writing, NHFG's request to issue a cost recovery bill was still being reviewed the New Hampshire Attorney General's office.

Two-for-Ones Along Franconia Ridge

Sunday, February 26, 2012, was a busy day for search and rescue on Mount Lafayette. Padraic M.-P., 29, Brian M.-P., age 27, Sean M.-P., age 31, and Julie S., age 26, all from Lowell, Massachusetts, attempted to climb to the summit of Mount Lafayette. The four hikers were successful in getting themselves into the harsh alpine environment, but that is where the success ended. No one in their group had any prior winter mountaineering experience, and no one carried proper winter equipment. When the conditions became too great to handle, the party called 911. They stated that they were unable to move because of the extreme cold and high winds near the summit of Mount Lafayette. The conditions were undoubtedly harsh and winter-like despite the mild winter that had enticed them onto one of the highest peaks in the Northeast. No one in the group had adequate clothing for the conditions, and it was clear that they were in well over their heads. The 911 dispatcher routed their call to NHFG, and a rescue mission was initiated.

Conservation officers Bob Mancini and Jeremy Hawkes headed up the mountain. Meanwhile, two hikers who were working their way along the Franconia Ridge came upon the group huddled together behind a rock. Brian C. and Simon L. approached the group and were told that they desperately needed help. The good Samaritans shared their extra food with the party and got them to drink the warm beverages that they carried in their thermoses. They also used their extra clothing and an emergency blanket (Mylar "space blanket") to boost the core temperatures of the coldest so that they could escort them down the mountain. Once the party had recovered to a reasonable degree, Brian and Simon provided hiking poles, and the group members began their descent to the safety of treeline down the Old Bridle Path. They encountered Mancini and Hawkes, who escorted the four hikers

from Lowell to the trailhead. From there, they were taken to Speare Memorial Hospital in Plymouth, where they were treated for frostbite and hypothermia.

While this was happening, another 911 call came in, this time for two hikers who needed assistance. The conservation officers returned to the trailhead and readied for another hike up the mountain. Song G., age 35, of Amherst, Massachusetts, and her companion Li Y., age unknown, of Burlington, Massachusetts, had left the trailhead at 9:00 A.M. to do the popular Old Bridle Path/Falling Waters Trail loop. They successfully summited Mount Lafayette at about noon. Then, as they traversed the Franconia Ridge toward the Falling Waters Trail, they came across the group of four hikers from Lowell. Song and Li could see that the four needed help, but they had nothing to provide the Lowell hikers as Song and Li too were ill prepared. They tried to call 911 but had no reception, so they pressed on with the intention of calling later when they had service.

On their descent, Song's legs cramped up, and she complained of being cold. Neither of the hikers had any extra warm clothing so Song tried to use a lightweight nylon shell as an inner layer on her legs to retain heat. Again they tried to call 911, but service was not available. Three hikers from Montreal, climbing up, passed the women but thought they were resting and not in need of help. But these three, Isabelle M., her father, Ghyslain M., and her boyfriend, Eric L., realized as they descended that Song and Li were in trouble because they were sitting in the same place they had been earlier. While Ghyslain and Eric provided Song with extra clothes, Isabelle hiked down to the trailhead, where she flagged down a passing motorist. Isabelle spoke little English but was able to convey that they needed someone to call 911. She was able to relay what was going on.

Conservation officers Mancini and Hawkes did U-turns and returned to the trailhead from which they had recently departed. There they met Isabelle and learned that her partners had lights and extra gear and were helping the two women down. The officers readied themselves for another hike, but at 8:05 P.M. they noticed headlamps coming down the trail. The Canadians' assistance had paid off; Song was able to hike out.

In the spring, another two-for rescue took place in the same area. At 7:15 P.M. on Saturday, May 12, 2012, NHFG received a call from a lost hiker. Mark W., 29, of Manchester, New Hampshire, had become lost after following the short spur from the Falling Waters Trail to view Shining Rock. Maps show this spur as a dead end 500 feet from the main trail. But Mark

believed that he was on the Falling Waters Trail and pushed on past the large wet slab of rock.

A NHFG officer was able to provide Mark with directions that enabled him to regain the trail, but he soon became stranded in the dark without a light. A couple of conservation officers hiked approximately 1.6 miles up the trail, found him, and gave him food, water, and a light. After shouldering their packs, they heard shouts and soon came across two other lost hikers and their dog. Corey R., 25, and Analia O., 20, both of Bedford, New Hampshire, also carried no light source or extra food. They also had taken a wrong turn as the daylight faded. They used Analia's cell phone for a flashlight but the batteries were almost dead. The officers escorted all three hikers and the dog to the trailhead.

Comment: All of these mishaps were the result of bad judgment, lack of equipment, and, in the case of the first two, lack of winter mountaineering experience. Song and Li carried summer packs, snowshoes, a map, compass, food, water, and a medical kit, but they carried little in the way of extra clothing. Li had done their route in summer, but conditions were far from what she had experienced on her previous trip. The maximum temperature recorded that day on Mount Washington was -1 degree Fahrenheit, winds gusted to 111 miles per hour, and a windchill advisory was in effect. Conditions on the slightly lower Franconia Ridge were only marginally better.

The four from Lowell were even less prepared. No one carried proper winter clothing, headlamps, or navigational aids (map, compass, or GPS). The three lost spring hikers made their own trouble, failing to carry lights or taking care with a map or description of their route.

The impressive mountains rising along the eastern side of Franconia Notch tower above Interstate 93 and attract a large number of hikers every year. Although not as tall as the Presidentials, the Franconia Ridge witnesses an equivalent number of misadventures every year. The routes of ascent are nearly equal in length to those required for a hike of Mount Washington, but there is no visitor center at their base where information providers can offer a reality check for the ill prepared. Time and time again, hikers bite off more than they can chew here. If hikers would start early, carry the essential equipment, and turn around when conditions dictate, the cost of search-and-rescue expenditures would certainly decrease.

The NHFG recommended that the state send bills for 10 percent of the incidents from the 2011–2012 winter season. Failure to carry the ten essentials (see hikesafe.com for more information) was a common thread throughout.

Often it was just a light source or map that people lacked, but in one incident a man in rubber boots decided to attempt an ascent of Mount Madison without anything but the cell phone in his pocket. Needless to say, his summit bid didn't turn out very well. He called for a rescue, and it was clear that his decision to head into the mountains unprepared was a form of negligence. NHFG recommended billing the man, but he was unemployed, and at the time of this writing, the New Hampshire Attorney General's Office hadn't decided whether to issue the bill.

The search-and-rescue funding debate is still going as strongly as ever. Recently updated figures support the need for reform. Between 2007 and 2011, the NHFG was called out 799 times to look for people who were lost, injured, or stranded. The total cost of these rescues was approximately \$1.5 million, and 56 percent of the incidents involved climbers or hikers. As discussed in earlier issues of *Appalachia*, the state's search-and-rescue fund does not come out of the general fund or originate from tax dollars. Its source is a \$1 fee on every boat, snowmobile, and all-terrain vehicle registration, and when the fund is depleted within a given year, the balance comes from the revenue generated by the sale of hunting and fishing licenses. These user groups accounted for a mere 16 percent of the search-and-rescue services, yet they continue to foot the bill for all operations.

So far, the negligent hiker law has failed to make a significant dent in the search-and-rescue budget. In the five-year period for which numbers were recently released, only 38 missions generated bills for cost recovery. The state recouped only \$53,000 of the \$83,025 it billed for incidents caused by recklessness or negligence. Only the most egregious cases generate bills, and the NHFG doesn't have the resources to pursue unpaid bills. A legislative committee was formed to look into the problem. Stay tuned for updates in the coming year.

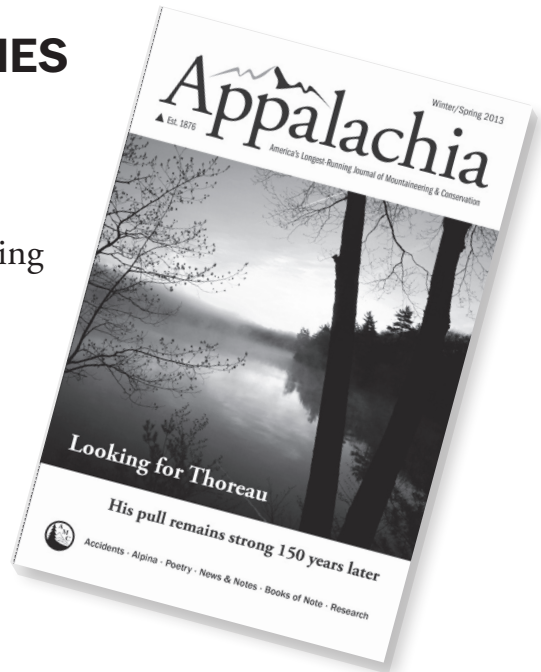
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