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Accidents

We should come home from adventures, and perils, and discoveries every day with new experience and character.—*Henry David Thoreau*

The weather from April through September 2010 in the White Mountains of New Hampshire was just about perfect, from an adventurer's standpoint. Temperatures were slightly above normal for five out of the six months and rainfall was low in all but October. The philosophy of resting when it rains no longer seemed to work. Beautiful weather drew crowds and provided a forgiving environment for their mistakes and accidents, and so it was a busy six months for the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department. Its conservation officers managed more than 90 calls, two-thirds of them from hikers, the rest dealing with kayakers, climbers, missing children, and suicide victims.

Last summer's accidents included familiar problems of heat exhaustion and hypothermia, slick rocks, and twisted knees. They also involved cell phones, helicopters, Google Earth, and Mylar blankets. Technology can actually cause accidents, but more and more it helps people. NHFG reports show that hikers are more likely to carry cell phones than even the necessary headlamps or flashlights. More than half of the incidents are reported via cell phone these days. Rescuers can talk the lost back onto trails or out to roads. Also, a cell phone is always communicating with towers near it, and search-and-rescue managers have located many lost people by "pinging" a cell phone—that is, using the tower's communication record to locate the phone. When you call 911, the system automatically begins to lock in the phone's coordinates. The accuracy of the coordinates varies, but this tool is becoming more refined and of greater value with each passing season.

One example of cell phones' place in rescues took place on a Saturday last October. A large group from the Chinese Bible Church of Greater Boston splintered into smaller groups while combing Gilford's Belknap Mountain. At 4:45 P.M., the first 911 call came in, from nine hikers, one of whom had fallen and hurt a wrist. The municipal fire and rescue department used the 911 system to locate the phone, and a crew drove to a trailhead on Wood Road

to begin walking in. When crew members arrived, they found a dozen hikers warming up inside a local house; that group reported that 29 people in all were unaccounted for.

As crews proceeded up the blue-blazed trail, a second 911 cell phone call went in to the command post, this time from seven hikers disoriented along the trail's boulder field (as the cell coordinates revealed). Despite the searchers' instructions that they wait for the rescuers (who were headed that way), for some reason that second group decided to head back to the fire tower on the summit. The rescuers searched the boulders, wondering where they had gone. Meanwhile, *another* group, this time of ten, called 911 after reaching an unfamiliar trailhead on the other side of the mountain. Yet one more call came in from nine who were on the summit. Each call came through with coordinates, and the incident commander confirmed where the lost parties were before developing a plan of action. The last member of the group was escorted off the mountain at 7:45 P.M.

Global positioning systems and their associated technology also have become pillars of searches and rescues. Cell phones have GPS tools, and searchers in the field carry small GPS units to record exactly which areas they have passed. During the lengthy August 2010 search for a missing woman in the Waterville Valley, incident commanders reviewed hundreds of searchers' GPS tracks on a single map.

Hikers are also using satellite-based personal messengers, known as SPOT beacons, more often around the White Mountains. Last July, a lost man used one to prevent a rescue—almost. While hiking from Madison Spring Hut to Pinkham Notch, he sprained his knee and had to spend the night on the Osgood Trail. He sent a message to his wife that said, essentially, "I'm fine but will be delayed." He had some emergency gear, but that night a bear found his trailside camp and ate all his food—and his bottle of sunblock, his bottle of ibuprofen, and his prescription medication. He was shaken up but otherwise fine. In the morning he sent a message to his wife on his SPOT saying he was OK.

The problem was that no one had relayed the bear story to the man's hiking partner, who had expected him to arrive at Pinkham the night before! Score one point for effective use of technology but take away two for forsaking basic communication.

For years now, the public has debated the problem of expensive searches and rescues. Hikers require them the most and don't pay for them, whereas the owners of snowmobiles, all-terrain vehicles, and power boats pay registration fees

that fund the searches and rescues, even though these groups account for only 10 percent of the rescues. Legislators have responded with the now infamous law that allows the state to bill a hiker whom they find was reckless or negligent. Although New Hampshire exercises its right to collect more often than do the handful of other states with similar laws, the collections barely make a dent in the costs. The state recovered the costs of only five incidents in 2010, a total of only \$10,000, though many others appear to have involved negligent behavior. The annual cost of the state's search-and-rescue program is \$260,000. New Hampshire legislators have so far not budgeted general funds for search and rescue. They continue to try to find a way to bill hikers. In early 2011, a bill was being considered in the state legislature to form a committee that would study sources of funding for searches and rescues.

Two Fall on the Mount Washington Headwall Trails

On Sunday, July 18, 2010, five friends geared up for their hike to the summit of Mount Washington. Heavy thunderstorms had pounded the mountain the night before, and a warm fog enveloped the summit. At 5 A.M., the Mount Washington Observatory was already recording 51 degrees Fahrenheit and forecasted the temperature to hold steady without much clearing. The day ended better than expected, and the group made the summit without problems. They went down the Tuckerman Ravine Trail, which, as it winds its way down through the ravine's steep headwall, crosses the Cutler River. At this point, the Cutler is only a small stream, but below the trail, it pours over a short cascade and flows across a smooth ledge. Below this ledge, the river pours over what is called Schiller's Rock in the main waterfall. (In the last issue of *Appalachia*, I described a climber's early winter death in this location. The victim probably fell from the area around Schiller's Rock, but the rock itself was not his final resting place as one might have inferred from the analysis.)

When the group reached the headwall area, it was approximately 5 P.M., and Christopher B., age 24, decided to go off trail for a closer look at the waterfall. While he skirted around the first cascade and pushed through the subalpine vegetation, his companions took pictures and recorded the scene on video. As Christopher tried to make his way toward the top of the waterfall, he slipped on the polished rock and landed feet-first facing the sloping ledge. The rushing water immediately washed him 20 feet down over Schiller's Rock and out of view of his friends.

The panicked group heard a scream from below but were unsure of its origin. One member of the group began running up the trail in hopes of acquiring a cell signal so that he could call for rescue. The others began to descend and quickly encountered another hiker who had seen the fall from below. He had immediately approached Christopher to assess his condition and quickly realized that the victim had not survived the 100-foot-plus fall. He told Christopher's friends that they should continue descending and report the accident. They did, and with the assistance of volunteer rescuers, Christopher's body reached the Pinkham Notch Visitor Center at 11 P.M.

A month later in the adjacent ravine, Sean M., 17, suffered a serious fall despite his extensive hiking abilities. He was just ahead of his father, Greg M., following the Huntington Ravine Trail up through the talus field known as the Fan. His younger brother, Aaron, was back with the father. They were experienced hikers, excited about tackling what many consider the most difficult trail in the Whites, and prepared with the correct equipment. Shortly after 11 A.M., they reached the base of the rock slab where the trail breaks away from Central Gully and heads diagonally up and to the right. The spot is a great vantage point, and Greg and Aaron decided to take a quick rest while Sean continued on.

Sean climbed up the slab and moved comfortably along the exposed trail, but then one small misstep caused him to slip and fall. Greg watched helplessly as Sean fell and tumbled 150 to 200 feet into the rocks below. Greg immediately grabbed his cell phone and dialed 911 as he searched for his son in the talus. After being connected to an emergency dispatcher, he finally found Sean, who was alive but with many significant injuries. Greg called down to a couple of hikers lower on the Fan, and they responded to his plea for assistance. A litter was obtained from the Albert Dow Rescue Cache a half-mile down the steep boulder-strewn descent trail.

The NHFG officers looked into using the New Hampshire Army National Guard to extract Sean with a helicopter, but the guard wasn't available. They next tried the Dartmouth-Hitchcock Advanced Response Team (DHART), but its helicopter lacks a hoist, making the ravine an impossible landing place without snow to level the floor. A long and arduous rescue ensued that involved more than 40 people from organized rescue teams. Sean was badly banged up, but he had no major injuries and he remained stable on the trip out. Rescuers carried him to the Sherburne Ski Trail, where a six-wheel all-terrain vehicle assisted with the remaining stretch to Pinkham Notch. At 6:30 P.M., the DHART helicopter airlifted him to the hospital in Lebanon,

where he was initially listed in fair condition. He was discharged a few days later and was expected to fully recover.

Comment: Nowhere on Earth but the White Mountains can you find such an expansive network of well-visited hiking paths that take the most direct routes up with little regard for leg muscles. These historic trails that tackle the fall line were constructed before erosion was a consideration and before the switchback came into vogue. These trails often weave through steep and complex terrain where off-trail travel is either impossible or dangerous. Hikers who thrive on exposure actually seek out these trails.

Sticking to the established trail is usually the best policy in steep terrain, but we've all gone off-trail to relieve ourselves, retrieve the falling water bottle cap, or see a better view. Christopher, the hiker who died, knew that a large waterfall tumbled below him and still chose to make his way out across the Tuckerman headwall. He should have understood how to calculate risks; he was training to be a skydive instructor. But he underestimated how slick the footing was, and he probably did not know how many have fallen and died at Schiller's Rock.

Sean, meanwhile, was an experienced hiker and had done some rock climbing. He knew that small slips could have drastic consequences.

The falls that the two young men took were similar in height and their individual outcomes could have easily been reversed. Whether on trail or off, we need to constantly assess the hazards around us and decide what level of risk we want to assume.

Stranded

The Tuckerman Ravine and Huntington Ravine trails are far from the only White Mountain paths that come within spitting distance of serious natural hazards. Within the Presidential Range alone, the Madison Gulf, Six Husbands, and Great Gully trails are all paths that thread the needle through steep areas with considerable exposure. On July 30, three young men decided to drop down the Great Gully Trail to cut miles off their original itinerary. Joseph G. and Christopher L., both age 28, and their friend Joel K., age 27, made it most of the way down the headwall of King Ravine before finding themselves stranded off-trail in a ledgy area not far above Mossy Fall. Feeling that they had run out of options, they called 911 on a cell phone. Two crew members from the Appalachian Mountain Club's Madison Spring Hut responded, as did two from the Randolph Mountain Club's Gray Knob

cabin. The volunteer rescuers found the three, helped them approximately 50 yards back to the trail, and then escorted them to Madison Spring Hut to spend the evening.

In a similar mishap in mid-September, another party of three young men got into trouble on the Tripyramid loop. Gregory C. and Paul N., both age 25, and Alexander R., age 24, left their vehicle on the Kancamagus Highway and began hiking at 10:30 A.M.. Their plan was to follow the Pine Bend Brook Trail to its end and then traverse the three summits of the Tripyramids. Unfortunately, they left their map in the car. After summiting the three peaks, they dropped down the opposite side of the mountain, where they eventually hit the Livermore Trail. They realized their mistake, and passing hikers suggested they follow the north leg of the Mount Tripyramid Trail over the northern summit. Although this route was shorter than retracing their steps, a better option would have been to follow the Scaur Ridge Trail, which would have avoided unnecessary elevation gain and difficult terrain. But the group followed the hikers' advice and before long found themselves on the famed North Slide. The group explored options up the edges of the steep rock slabs, but before they knew it the entire party of three had gotten themselves stuck. To make matters worse, Gregory was having back pain related to surgery he'd had three years earlier. The group had cellular service at their location and decided to call 911 to request assistance. NHFG conservation officers and volunteer rescuers responded and began their hike to the scene. They found the stranded party, assisted them off the slide using ropes, and accompanied them on the hike out.

Comment: These hikers could have avoided becoming stranded by following the first principle of the hikeSafe hiker responsibility code—be prepared with knowledge and gear. Without a map or an understanding of the area trails, they ventured into hazardous terrain they did not know. They had not adequately researched the options for hiking out.

Take short notes on your options, and carry this information with you. It can easily be kept with your map in a waterproof bag or written in a pocket-size waterproof notebook such as the one I have tucked in my first-aid kit. The AMC *White Mountain Guide* provides detailed warnings about the routes that have historically been the most challenging for hikers. Many of the other trails can still give you trouble in the wrong conditions, but if there's a known, constant, and pronounced hazard, key into it ahead of time. The guidebook warns against taking the challenging routes when they're wet, you

have a large pack, are hiking with dogs, have a fear of heights or exposure, or are descending.

A second way to keep from getting yourself stranded is to pay close attention to trail markers. Paint blazes are designed to be targets for hikers to see and walk toward. But realize that blazes are not maintained within the six Wilderness Areas of the White Mountain National Forest. Mount Trip Pyramid's North Slide is within the Sandwich Range Wilderness and old paint blazes have faded or been removed. Rock cairns mark routes, but realize that wandering hikers build cairns wherever the urge strikes them. Trail crews and backcountry rangers spend a portion of their field time dismantling cairns that could lead hikers off the trail. Following trails is essentially following the tracks of those who have passed before us. Watch for trail markers but also for pruned branches and constructed features such as water bars or scree walls. You can also look for footprints and signs of soil compaction, but if you're confused in an area, there's a good possibility that the last person through also fumbled around trying to figure it out.

When I first began rock climbing, my friend Mash told me that when there was no rope to prevent a fall, I must follow an important rule: Never climb up anything that you can't climb back down, awkward though it may be. Though I will openly admit I have not followed this rule as gospel, I always consider it before committing to a difficult move. Before my daughter could walk, she climbed couches and curtains, and she learned this same rule—to down-climb—so well that by age 5 she had no trouble climbing a couple hundred feet up Whitehorse Ledge. She knew she could scamper right back down if necessary.

Cardiac Emergencies

Robert M., age 52, was hiking the Cave Mountain Trail in Bartlett with his wife on Friday, October 8, 2010, when he sat down, saying he felt tired and dizzy and felt pain in his chest. Resting didn't make him feel any better, so his wife wisely hiked back to the car and called 911. Rescuers got to Robert fairly quickly and loaded him into a rescue litter for immediate evacuation. They wheeled the litter back to the trailhead where he was transported by ambulance to the hospital.

A September incident on Mount Adams required a different approach. Ernie R., age 63, experienced severe chest pain as he was hiking with his son

on Lowe's Path toward Gray Knob cabin, which is just below treeline on the north side of Mount Adams. When they got to the cabin, the caretaker placed a 911 cell phone call. It was 4:30 P.M. Rescue teams were called to standby, and NHTSA began calling about helicopter availability. As luck would have it, the New Hampshire State Police helicopter and crew were at the Lancaster State Fair just west of the cabin. NHTSA Conservation Officer Matthew Holmes was picked up by the helicopter on its way to assess landing options. (Like the Dartmouth helicopter, the police ship has no mechanical hoist.) Clouds moved in just 200 feet higher than Gray Knob, but the pilot found a spot 100 yards from the cabin where he could hover close to the ground while Holmes and another crew member jumped out. They loaded Ernie into the hovering helicopter, jumped back in and took the short ride down to Route 2 to meet an ambulance.

Three hikers died of heart attacks on White Mountain trails. One particularly sad story unfolded on Mount Lafayette's Old Bridle Path. On Wednesday, September 22, 2010, Terrance F., age 71, climbed up to spread the ashes of a deceased friend. Terrance's wife and the friend's widow waited below. At 1:35 P.M., a descending hiker who happened to be a doctor came across Terrance sitting down against a rock wall at the base of the steep section of trail known as the Agonies. The doctor checked for signs of life and then called 911 to report that he was dead. While he waited for the authorities, Terrance's cell phone rang; the doctor answered it and had to tell Terrance's wife the bad news. Volunteers carried the body 1.5 miles to the trailhead. He had spread his friend's ashes before dying.

Comment: According to the American Heart Association, about every 34 seconds, someone in the United States has a heart attack. It's likely that other heart problems went unreported in the mountains. Understand the signs and symptoms of heart attacks even if you aren't in a high-risk category. Most attacks come on slowly, and victims are slow to understand what might be wrong. They suffer shortness of breath and don't feel better after resting. Many feel chest pain, a classic sign of an attack, but the pain can also be located in other areas of the upper body, especially the jaw and arms. Nausea and dizziness are also common, and some victims describe unusual heartbeats (rapid, strong, or skipping beats). Early recognition of signs is important to save lives, and this is especially true in the backcountry. The quick response by the caretaker at Gray Knob may have saved Ernie's life. Had he resisted the urge to call, the cloud ceiling could have easily lowered a few hundred feet and shut out the option of helicopter rescue.

Dunk Your Head in the Moats!

On Monday, May 24, 2010, Mary H., age 58, began her attempt at traversing the Moat Range. It was supposed to be a splendid, warm day. She and her daughter enjoyed the rolling granite mountains' open views. As the day wore on, Mary began to feel poorly. Her legs were shaky, she was having trouble talking, and she seemed to be losing feeling in her face and arms. A nurse herself, Mary recognized that she was exhibiting signs of heat exhaustion and she lay down in a small stream to cool off. Her daughter's cell phone had a signal, and she used it to call 911 and request assistance. Rescuers hiked in to their location on South Moat and with some additional rest and a cold beverage, Mary was able to walk out under her own power.

In midsummer, a 20-year-old female collapsed from heat exhaustion on the Twinway near Mount Guyot. The AMC's Guyot Campsite caretaker responded with volunteers, and after some rest and water, the victim was able to hike out without help. DHART returned to the Twinway ridge-line later in the month to evacuate a woman who was suffering from severe dehydration. Numerous other incidents involving dehydration and heat exhaustion occurred during the summer both with and without involvement from NHFG.

Comment: The summer of 2010 was warm and dry—not hot enough to dissuade hikers from going out, but perfect for heat injuries. The enjoyment hikers find on the trails often shrinks when they lack water and suffer exposure. Although you want to try to save weight on longer hikes, water is usually worth its weight in gold. Because of its scarcity in the alpine areas, you should recognize and capitalize on opportunities to use water. Dunk your head in the stream you step over. Wet a bandanna to drape over your neck; this feels good and helps to keep your body temperature down. Nutrition, hydration, and adequate rest are the real keys to avoiding heat injuries, but nothing feels better than a splash of cold mountain water when it's hotter than a firecracker.

The Mighty, Stubborn Thor

On Saturday, June 26, 2010, Elizabeth R., age 47, and her boyfriend Brian H., age 49, set out with plans to climb Mount Liberty. It was about 9:30 A.M. when they left their vehicle and started up the trail with their dog, Thor. They made it to the summit but by 12:30 P.M. decided to descend because the weather was deteriorating. Thor had been on numerous hikes before, but that

day the 130-pound Akita decided he had had enough. Thor refused to budge. Feeling she had no other options, Elizabeth used her cell phone to call 911 and ask for assistance. As is the agency policy, the NHFG conservation officer told her that they do not organize pet rescues. She was advised to descend to the Flume Visitor Center, ask to use the rescue litter and then organize volunteers to retrieve the dog. She did exactly that and at 6:30 P.M., Thor began his ride down the mountain in a Stokes litter. It was extremely slow going with a small crew of rescuers and at 8 P.M., one hiker went down to the visitor center to summon additional help. The weather was poor with light drizzle and cooler than average temperatures. Help was nowhere to be found. At 10 P.M., Elizabeth made another 911 call on her cell phone, this time asking for medical help for herself. She said she had been vomiting and was cold, tired, and wet from all the rain.

Volunteers from the Pemi Valley Search and Rescue Team hiked in three quarters of a mile to the location of the group and provided Elizabeth with food, water, and extra clothing. They found her to be mildly hypothermic, but she seemed to be improving. Despite their best efforts, she refused to leave the dog. Conservation officers hiked in to the scene, and as dawn approached, they finally convinced her to walk out to her car to get some rest. Brian stayed with the dog for the rest of the night. After two hours of resting in the car, Elizabeth headed back up the trail and waited with Brian and Thor until a group of Boy Scouts came along in the morning. They helped carry Thor to the parking lot, which they reached at 9 A.M., almost 24 hours after Elizabeth, Brian, and Thor started out. A veterinarian told Elizabeth that Thor had been dehydrated and exhausted but suffered no major illness or injury.

Comment: Dogs were made for the outdoors. These animals evolved in outdoor environments where they ranged great distances in search of food and companionship. Even after domestication, these animals lived outside for thousands of years before dog beds and sweater jackets and “designer dog” breeding (emphasizing traits that are easy to care for) became commonplace. A 130-pound Akita is hardly a designer dog. The breed originated in a mountainous climate in northern Japan. Why, then, couldn’t Thor live up to his namesake, the hammer-wielding Norse god of thunder, lightning, and strength?

Dogs, like people, need water for nearly all bodily functions, and when their bodies try to operate in the red, things start to shut down. Muscle strength and coordination are some of the first things to go, just as they are in

humans. Prevent dehydration by finding ways to push water when they don't naturally guzzle it down. Sled dog racers have known this for decades. They mix dry food with water and add beef broth to water. These tricks help dogs that aren't active drinkers. A few beef bouillon cubes and a collapsible water dish can go a long way.

Consider also: Is Scruffy fit for this type of undertaking? Does he have a medical condition or ailment? Does he enjoy hiking? Second are all the things that responsible dog owners consider on a regular basis. Is Rex good around other people and dogs? Is he obedient enough to be off leash, or do I need to keep him under control at all times? In the Whites, dogs often suffer lower-leg injuries. Cut pads are the most common ailment and usually result from hiking above treeline on sharp metamorphic rock such as what dominates the Presidential Range.

Off-leash hiking is allowed in the White Mountain National Forest, as long as dogs are under voice control. But dogs get separated from their owners all too often in the mountains, often because dogs chase wildlife. Does your pooch chase squirrels at home? You must watch him closely so that you don't lose him when he's in pursuit of a fleeing snowshoe hare. Obedience is as critical in the mountains to avoid your dog getting lost as it is at a dog park in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

A Space Blanket and a Spot to Lay His Head

At 10 A.M. on Friday, August 27, 2010, three women were hiking up the Benton Trail on Mount Moosilauke. They came upon a severely hypothermic man 0.6 miles below the summit. Howard E., age 83, had little gear with him and was lying in the middle of the trail, his skin an ashen gray. While one of the hikers called 911 on her cell phone, the others set about trying to get Howard warmed up. An Appalachian Trail thru-hiker happened by, and together the group got him into dry clothes and then into a sleeping bag. They provided Howard with food and used a stove to make some hot beverages. His condition improved, but he still couldn't walk and continued to show the signs of hypothermia.

Howard had left the trailhead the prior day at 11:15 A.M. with a forecast for poor weather. A cold front was expected to pass through the area, touching off rain showers and possible lightning before temperatures dropped into the evening hours. He summited the mountain, but going down injured his knee, the same knee that had given him trouble before.

Howard was more than three miles from the trailhead when he got hurt, and he decided that his best bet was to wait for someone to come along. When no one did, he spent the night out in the open with little more than a thin emergency blanket.

After the hikers called 911, NHFG quickly initiated a rescue mission. A helicopter evacuation seemed logical with DHART so close by, but as the ship approached, the pilot recognized that clouds were going to prevent him from landing on the relatively flat summit area. Rescue crews were already on the trail and NHFG conservation officer Bradley Morse reached the victim shortly before 1 P.M. As rescuers provided Howard with more warm clothes and fluids there was a break in the clouds, and DHART agreed to give it another try. The clearing held and the helicopter successfully landed on the summit. The rescuers then carried Howard more than a half mile uphill to the flying ambulance, which in turn transported him to the hospital for evaluation.

Comment: Howard's space blanket may have saved his life. One of these Mylar sheets is a lightweight piece of insurance that is well worth tossing in your pack. Not only does it retain heat, it's waterproof; both will help during an unplanned bivouac such as the one Howard endured. When you purchase a blanket, it's compressed into a little brick, and I guarantee you once you open it, it will never get that small again. Some are simply rectangular blankets, and others are bivy sacks, the latter being superior but more costly. You can greatly improve the efficiency of the standard blanket by taping the seams with duct tape or medical tape after wrapping the patient. In either situation, it's important that people are wearing dry insulation layers in this "emergency burrito" because the blanket only reflects the body's radiating heat and increases the humidity levels. In a pinch, a simple trash bag does a reasonably effective job as well. Carrying additional emergency gear such as warm, dry clothes would have made Howard's experience a little less miserable.

At a White Mountain Search and Rescue Working Group meeting in fall 2010, a rescuer commented on the number of recent incidents that involved older people. Looking at the search and rescue numbers for NHFG's first quarter (July, August, September), I found that of the 39 hiker-related incidents (out of a total of 54), 8 of the victims were 70 or older. These numbers are in line with a national trend that shows that the segment of our population eligible for retirement is more active. Life expectancy continues to rise, and it's not uncommon to have someone twice your age pass you on the trail.

A simple slip or trip can have more severe consequences when your joints and bones have been exploring the planet for three-quarters of a century. Of all the older people who suffered mishaps in these mountains in 2010, most of them were exhausted. Trips and falls were often a direct result. To reduce their likelihood of an incident, older hikers should formulate itineraries that are based on their current fitness and not on what they've done before, even if that was recently. It may be wise to strongly consider a policy of not hiking alone. A companion could have easily gone for help when Howard twisted his knee the first day, and he never would have had to endure an open bivouac.

Howard was found by hikers who happened upon him. It is unclear if he had left his itinerary with anyone, but no one had reported him missing. If the women hadn't found him, it is unclear how long he would have survived on this little-used section of the Benton Trail. Not far above his location was the Benton Trail's junction with the Beaver Brook Trail, which is also the Appalachian Trail and a much more trodden path. Although he was unable to walk, Howard could have considered other options besides waiting for someone to pass by. He could have crawled his way up to the junction with the Beaver Brook Trail with the idea that it would be more likely for someone to come hiking along. Another option was to crawl his way down the Benton Trail. Yes, that would mean three miles of slow and painful travel, but at very least he would have been generating heat and fighting the icy grip of hypothermia. When I shattered my ankle in Yosemite a number of years ago, I had to crawl, do the crab walk, and basically drag my own butt back down to the closest road. It wasn't a three-mile adventure, but it was an adventure nonetheless, especially when I realized I was skitching across a nest of ground wasps!

Who Turned Out the Lights?

On Sunday, June 13, 2010, Ronald F., 37, parked on the Sandwich Notch Road with the intent of hiking a loop that included a visit to Black Mountain Pond. The route checked in as more than nine miles long, but when Ronald set off, he had nothing more than a light jacket, a cell phone, and his keys. His dog accompanied him, and together they successfully made it through the first part of the hike before Ronald became disoriented on the Guinea Pond Trail. He tried to backtrack but eventually lost the trail. Darkness settled in, and without a light, Ronald had little chance of finding his way out of the woods.

He then used his cell phone to call for a rescue. NHFG conservation officers hiked in and used whistles to locate Ronald soon after midnight.

The following Friday, Mady D., age 51, set out to climb Mount Washington from the west with two companions. They didn't start until 11:30 A.M., and when they were coming down late in the day, Mady injured a knee that had given her trouble in the past. She could still hobble, but the group quickly realized that they were going to be benighted, and none of them had a headlamp. Mady kept hobbling down the trail while one of her partners called 911. They were more than three miles up the Jewell Trail, above treeline and not prepared to self-rescue. Some of the crew from the Lakes of the Clouds Hut came to help and they escorted Mady down the trail. Conservation officers also began hiking up the Jewell Trail, and they met the group about a mile above the Cog Railway's base station. Mady hiked out herself with the help of the light-bearing escorts.

On Columbus Day weekend, a group of students from Brown University traveled to the White Mountains with plans to go hiking. Their weekend started with poor weather and a thick glaze of ice covered the higher summits. Sunday was sunny but cold and windy, and the group headed for a popular nine-mile loop on the Franconia Ridge. The group started up the Old Bridle Path and made it to the summit of Mount Lafayette without incident. From there, things began to fall apart as the big group spread out and then split up, three physics graduate students separating from the rest. Mingming J., Xu Luo, and Xu Liu missed their turn onto the Falling Waters Trail and continued south toward Mount Liberty. They knew that something was wrong but had no map to reference. One of the men used a cell phone to look at Google Earth, and the three then agreed that they would take a shortcut through the woods to return to the trailhead. There was no trail to follow and they set off on a bushwhacking adventure high on the slopes of the Franconia Ridge. They thrashed through the woods until it became dark and then called 911. Searchers found them at 2 A.M. and walked them out. The group had no lights, map, food, extra clothes, or matches.

Comment: This was another of many incidents each year that would not have happened had the people taken the necessary equipment. As a starting point, these are ten essential items outlined by hikeSafe: map, compass, warm clothing (wool or synthetic, NOT cotton), extra food and water, flashlight or headlamp, matches/fire starters, first-aid kit and repair kit, whistle, rain/wind jacket and pants, and pocket knife. These items should form the base

of equipment for any hike. Depending on the weather and length of your trip, you might need other items, but these are the starting point. Darkness is rather predictable and easy to manage if you bring the right gear.

It's likely that both Ronald and Mady would have been able to save themselves if they had carried lights or started earlier to use the full amount of daylight to their advantage. The entire escape on the Franconia Ridge might never have occurred had they taken flashlights and a good map.

Know How to Use It

The ten essentials are only as good as your understanding of how to use them. On August 20, 2011, Phyllis R., age 52, completed most of her intended loop up the Gale River Trail, across the Garfield Ridge Trail and then down the Garfield Trail. She began her hike at 9 A.M. and planned to be done by 4 P.M. At the first intersection that she encountered, she went the wrong way and didn't realize it until she ended up at Galehead Hut. After being sent in the right direction by the hut crew, she missed another turn and wasted more valuable time. Before she knew it, she was hiking in the dark. At 10:15 P.M., she called the AMC's Highland Center where she had spent the previous evening. She was at an unsigned junction and needed directions. Every time that she tried to move forward with resolution, she second guessed herself and backtracked. Eventually she was connected to a NHFG conservation officer who helped talk her down the trail. In their conversation, she mentioned that she had all of the hikeSafe ten essentials. Only later did it come out that her compass was actually just an application on her iPhone. She admitted that she didn't trust it, and her experience navigating with topographical maps was also limited. The gear is only as good as what you possess in associated knowledge, skill, and ability. Be prepared with knowledge and gear. Become self-reliant by learning about the terrain, conditions, local weather, and your equipment before you start.

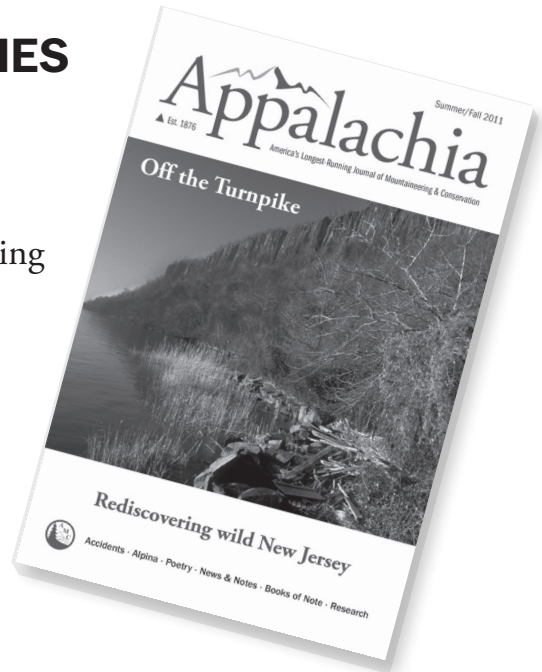
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