

They started early the next morning, virtually scampering 310 meters up the frozen gully, and reached the top in about 90 minutes. Then, although it was snowing heavily and the plan they had left behind called for them to descend by way of a ridge called the Lion's Head, which separates the two ravines as a nose does the eyes, they decided to leave behind the weight of their overnight bivouac gear and make a dash for the summit, about 500 meters above them. Meanwhile, the snowfall grew heavier.

For the next three days, as the cold deepened and the winds lifted above 225 kph, neither they nor anyone else knew where they were. They had stopped short of the summit and had begun to descend, but the wind had blown them off course. They had left their compass behind with their overnight gear. As they tried to follow a winding and partly hidden stream downhill, Herr fell in twice. Although Batzer managed to pull him out and gave him a pair of his own dry wool pants, Herr's lower legs began to freeze. They spent that night and the next two nights in a cocoon of cut spruce branches in the shelter of a large rock, legs locked together, hugging each other for warmth.

When the two did not return to the cabin that night, Matt Pierce, Harvard Cabin's caretaker, radioed the Mountain Rescue Service (MRS). On Sunday morning, (January 24) members of the MRS began to make their way up the mountain. However, they could not see their feet in the blinding snow and withdrew.

On Monday (January 25) the air was clearer. Albert Dow and Michael Hartrick, members of the MRS, made their way up the left side of Odell's Gully, found some kick marks in the snow leading over the rim and decided to search the missing climbers' planned descent route down Lion's Head.

Fifteen minutes later, Bill Kane, the team leader, heard Hartrick on the radio. "He's screaming, I thought. "Why is he screaming on the mike?"

There had been an avalanche. (See following report.)

The same day, Cam Bradshaw, a young woman who works at Pinkham Notch Camp, was out snowshoeing. She saw some floundering tracks in the snow, followed them, and found the two missing young men. When Misha Kirk, a 31-year-old paramedic on the rescue team reached them, Herr was near death from the bitter cold and his legs were solidly frozen into the mid-calf; Batzer was badly frostbitten. A New Hampshire National Guard helicopter braved the winds to lift them out, leaving Kirk to walk back down the mountain. (Source: Dudley Clendinen, *The New York Times*, March 2, 1982)

## **AVALANCHE**

### **New Hampshire, Mount Washington**

Albert Dow, a member of the New Hampshire Mountain Rescue Service, died in an avalanche near the base of the Lion's Head while engaged in a search for two missing climbers (see previous report). The details of this accident follow.

"Michael Hartrick and Albert Dow, members of the Mountain Rescue Service of North Conway (New Hampshire) had just completed a climb in Odell's Gully, Huntington Ravine, in search of two ice climbers overdue since Saturday night (January 23, 1982). Upon topping off (no trace of climbers found in gully), they noted footprints heading across the east side of the mountain toward the Lion's Head and Tuckerman Ravine, which they followed. Upon reaching Lion's Head,

they started down the summer trail, carefully avoiding potential avalanche slopes, somehow crossed the winter trail and ended up well below the treeline in the area where they were avalanched.

"The tracks were obscured by the time I had a chance to investigate but, based on educated conjecture, they entered the slide path between 12 and 20 meters below the fracture, setting it off by hiking across it. Both men passed through a considerable number of trees during the avalanche and ended up within a few feet of each other near the center of the deposition toe. Dow was last seen by Hartrick a few feet above him to the right and ended up a few feet below and to the right. A considerable amount of deposition stayed in the trees above the area where they finally stopped.

"Hartrick was carrying a radio on which, after he managed to dig out his head, one arm and, somehow, the radio, he communicated their plight. Luckily, myself and one other person had started up the Lion's Head winter route to meet them, and the Forest Service Thiokol was two minutes from the trailhead with the two Snow Rangers and eight other searchers from the Mountain Rescue Service. The Snow Rangers dropped the climbers off and then proceeded to the Ravine to get probes and shovels. Since Hartrick and Dow were originally understood to be on the summer trail, heading toward the winter trail, we initially searched there. On a hunch, I skied over to the opposite side of the winter route, heard Hartrick yelling some distance below and notified everyone else, including the Snow Rangers who had returned with the equipment. I then skied through the thicker woods to the scene, ascertained that Hartrick, though mostly buried, was in no immediate danger and proceeded to do a quick visual check of the deposition for a sign of Dow, directing others as they arrived to do as I was or to dig out Hartrick. The Rangers arrived with the probes and we first probed areas of deposition above where Hartrick was found with the idea that Dow very likely was stopped in the trees. He hadn't been, however, and a probe line discovered his body very close to where Hartrick had stopped. There was no sign of there having been any respiration while buried and CPR produced no results. It was apparent from his obvious injuries that he had hit a number of trees." (Source: Joe Gill, Snow Ranger, Appalachian Mountain Club)

### **Analysis**

This series of events resulted in much controversy at the state and local level. The issues, as usual, are the regulation of climbing and who shall be responsible for the costs and hazards of rescue efforts. Nationally, most especially in the Pacific Northwest, volunteer rescue units have been the primary means for extracting lost and injured parties from the wilderness. Wilderness search and rescue, in fact, is one of the last service arenas in which one can be a volunteer; most people who are involved, act in the spirit of good Samaritanism. The cost of mountain rescue has escalated, primarily because of the use of helicopter evacuations. Although this technical development has saved many lives, the cost, in most cases, is borne by the taxpayers. The U.S. Forest Service and the National Park Service are, as custodians of public lands, charged with the responsibility for rescue. Given their budgetary constraints, they are appreciative of help from volunteers and other agencies. State park officials are in the same situation. New Hampshire is a very conservative state, especially in fiscal matters; it is close to the bottom of all states in matters such as

support of education and human services. But, as a result of this accident—which brought the death toll on Mount Washington close to the 100 mark—the New Hampshire State Senate met in special session and passed a bill to provide workman's compensation insurance to volunteers of the New Hampshire Mountain Rescue Service.

With a few more years of experience behind them, the young men who were the objects of the search might have done things a bit differently, such as carry adequate winter equipment and walk downhill in a straight line. Both of them lost parts of their anatomy as a result of their frostbite but are still active in outdoor pursuits. (See the report of the Shawangunk accident involving Herr.)

Since the avalanche, the members of the search and rescue team have purchased Pieps radio beacons and have taken a course in avalanche forecasting from the American Avalanche Institute. Yet, any of us involved in search and rescue know that, even with the best knowledge available, there will continue to be times when, because an individual or group is in need of assistance, chances such as Dow and Hartrick took will be necessary. In the wilderness, unlike urban settings where we read about people in distress being passed by, it seems that the basic human response, fortunately, is still to go to the aid of those in need, no matter who they are or how they managed to get into their predicament. (Source: J. Williamson)

### **FALL ON SNOW, INEXPERIENCE**

#### **New Hampshire, Mount Washington**

In late March 1982, Kathy Hamman (25) fell 130 meters to her death while climbing in Connection Gully in Tuckerman Ravine. Her partner, Barry Schempf (26), also fell while trying to reach her but received only minor injuries. He had climbed before but she was inexperienced.

The temperature at the time was  $-17^{\circ}\text{C}$ , with 80 kph winds. (Source: Appalachian Mountain Club)

#### **Analysis**

This was the 100th fatality on Mount Washington since 1849. Well over two thirds of these have involved hikers or skiers not familiar with climbing or the severe weather. Half the fatalities have occurred in summer and were a result of exposure; the weather is a significant factor on this mountain. Winds exceed hurricane force an average of 100 days a year, the annual snowfall is close to three meters and the average temperature is  $-2^{\circ}\text{C}$ . (Source: J. Williamson and the Appalachian Mountain Club)

### **BAD WEATHER, HYPOTHERMIA, FROSTBITE, INADEQUATE EQUIPMENT, INEXPERIENCE**

#### **New Mexico, Wheeler Peak**

On May 14, 1982, Steve Hendley (20) and Chris Dolby (20) were descending from the 4300-meter summit of Mount Wheeler when they began to encounter intermittent snowstorms.