

Mountaineer

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INSPIRED

Stories of achieving
and exceeding goals

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Mountaineers ready, willing when skills are called upon



Jessica Todd, who led The Mountaineers party that responded to the call for help on Forbidden, makes her way to its true summit

Stefanie Schiller photo

By Linsey Warren

Whether a climber, skier, scrambler or hiker, many join The Mountaineers to learn backcountry fundamentals and safety. Sometimes the lessons are hard-learned or even frustrating, but those of us who go on to make mountaineering a lifelong commitment are likely to be called upon at some point to use our training and skills. And this past year, the call for help was heeded by Mountaineers more than just once.

While Mountaineers climb leader Eileen Kutscha and her party were heading up the Witches Tower in the Enchantments, they heard yells for help from Aasgard Pass and went down to investigate. Assessing the situation, they were able to immediately assist by building an anchor and lowering people down into a moat to search for the missing victim. While part of their party was searching, another group headed to the top of Dragontail Peak to call for help. And when that help arrived in the form of a military helicopter, the crew ended up using the rigging system that The Mountaineers group had put together. They were even able to provide extra clothing and gear for the airman

to use while in the moat.

On July 23, longtime Mountaineers climb leader and instructor Cebe Wallace led a group uneventfully up the notoriously beautiful Eldorado Peak. Uneventful until the way down, when a solo climber slipped and, unable to self-arrest, slid into a moat. The victim was able to crawl out of the moat but was severely hypothermic.

Calling upon their basic training and first aid, the group was able to get him out of his wet clothes, into a sleeping bag and give him an examination to assess his injuries. The party elected two of its fastest climbers to go notify authorities while the rest began a slow descent with the victim, who was able to walk with assistance. On the way down, The Mountaineers group encountered an Alpine Ascents party whose satellite phone was used to communicate with the rangers. The Mountaineers group continued the descent with the victim until they met with park officials.

The leader summed up the trip well when he said, "Our party of mostly basic course students performed an excellent rescue, recognizing and treating hypothermia, assessing injuries, giving TLC,

Courses prepare climbers for the unexpected afield

We develop climbers with strong technical skills, the expectation and ability to make sound mountain judgment, and preparation for the unexpected. It is this very training and culture within The Mountaineers climbing community that allows us to climb safely in the Cascades and other mountain ranges throughout the world. It also trains our climbers to be able to not only ensure their own group's safety, but also to quickly and safely respond to other climbing groups when their own judgment potentially leads to an accident or life-threatening situation. As a result, what might be a fatal situation can become a rescue success story.

Mark Scheffer, Chair
Seattle Branch Climbing Committee

Every year I can remember since joining the Climbing Committee, we have considered and debated new techniques and when to incorporate them into our basic and intermediate curriculum. Some that I recall include the cordelette, using belay devices for rappel, the AutoBlock, 5.5mil spectra vs.

7mm nylon, the equallette, so on and so on. Most recently, it was eliminating oval carabiners from basic gear list.

The Mountaineers comprises a large community of active climbers and instructors who are passionate about climbing and remain on the forefront of new methods and techniques. Accordingly, all our branch chairs come together for a climbing summit several times a year.

Different from commercial climbing courses, we expect each climbing party member to learn, to have all the knowledge and skills to be self-sufficient in the mountains and to develop leadership skills. Yes, compared to some other programs, it takes much longer to take The Mountaineers basic course and develop the skills to do glacier climbs like Rainier, or rock climbs like the Beckey route on Liberty Bell. But it costs less (about 25 percent) and is comprehensive.

Gene Yore, Past Chair
Seattle Branch Climbing Committee

and formulating a rescue plan in a calm and reasonable manner. It could not have been done better, I think." He added, "One student commented that it was just like a scenario in his recently completed first aid course. This speaks well of our training, and of course, of the character of the people involved."

Not a month later, I found myself descending Forbidden.

Another group we had met on the route had talked about descending the rock bypass, but our group decided to descend the couloir. Not too long after our first rappel we heard a large rockslide trigger on the bypass, where two other parties of two were descending. Minutes later there was a call for assistance, but we still had a few tricky moats and beshcrunds to navigate. And as one might imagine, hearing the rock fall only heightened our sense of security, so we took every precaution to ensure our safety. I was amazed at how level-headed our group stayed.



Improvised splint on Forbidden

Once we reached a point where we could safely walk, the parties in trouble enlisted our assistance to move the victim, via hand lines, farther down the basin towards a flat bench where we could see numerous tents had been set up. We walked into the large campsite after midnight and roused the sleeping group to see if we could appropriate extra assistance. This group had a satellite phone and, after some wrangling, consented to call for help. Meanwhile we applied first aid to the victim.

By early morning we made it to the trailhead and ran into a ranger who was responding to the 2 a.m. call for help, but he had incorrect information about the incident. We provided the accurate details and the ranger relayed it to her incident commander.

... convincing me that very high-caliber individuals belong to The Mountaineers

Soon after, the ranger station summoned a rescue helicopter.

While we were at the Marblemount Ranger Station, one of the rangers noted that Mountaineers had given assistance and left a positive impression numerous times this summer. As a group that has come together to share and celebrate the outdoors, we are also a group that has proven willing to assist others, convincing me that very high-caliber individuals belong to The Mountaineers. ▲▲

About the author

Linsey Warren got a taste for the outdoors at a young age, learning how to build igloos and hike with the Boy Scouts. Years later, while living in Europe, she developed a taste for vertical rock and acquired the skills to sport climb. Hungry for more, she joined The Mountaineers in 2003, enrolled in basic climbing, then the intermediate course and later to advanced alpine rock. She spent two months in Nunavik learning about Inuit culture and Arctic survival training in 2010.



Linsey Warren photo