



Founding Member: **Mountain Rescue Association**

Rescue



Web Edition

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Searching for a “buried victim”

—Photo by D. Swift

SNOW SAFETY & AVALANCHE SEARCH TRAINING, FEB. 2-3, 2013

--BRAD ACKER

Well, it’s that time of year again to brush up on all things avalanche. IMSARU has had a spike in new members in the last few months; it has made for well-attended training sessions and this year’s avalanche class was no exception. In addition, the science which has been applied to snowpack and rescue techniques has changed at a very past pace in the last several years. How do I put this politely?... If a Rouché block test is still your go-to evaluation tool or you are on the second edition of Snow Sense, it’s time to update your skill set.

Our format was four hours of classroom work spread over two weekday evenings plus two days of field training. [Sorry, folks, we can’t count what happened at night in downtown Fairfield as field training. What happens in Fairfield stays in Fairfield!] Avalanche and snow science being a very wide subject, our classroom and field work stuck to the meat and potatoes of the matter. This class was not up to the standards of a full National Ski Patrol or American Avalanche Association Level 1 class, but was more focused on the specific needs of SAR personnel. Snow metamorphism is a facet-nating subject (get it?) but we did not have nearly enough time for near surface facets or the rationale behind radiation recrystallization. This class was light on snowpack and human factors, and heavy on evaluation and rescue. We thank Winston Cheyney for support on the classroom sessions and some good DVDs we watched in the evening during the field training.

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Our classroom sessions were full both nights and nearly everyone who attended the classroom went into the field.

Counting the instructors, Mark Westerdoll and myself, we had 24 members in the field training. It's exciting to have such good turnouts but also taxing on unit-supplied equipment and logistics. On the travel and evaluation side, students learned how to recognize avalanche terrain. I drilled in the value of, and how to use, a slope inclinometer, along with how to perform and understand the results of a column test (CT) and the extended column test (ECT). On the rescue side, all aspects of a companion rescue and organized rescue were picked apart, taught independently and followed by full-scale drills, complete with totally freaked-out witnesses.

This year we wanted to make the field session a bit different and also reach out to the good people up in Fairfield, so we went about two hours northeast of Boise to Soldier Mountain Resort, which Bruce Willis recently donated to the community to be run as a non-profit. The new energy at Soldier Mountain is great; Don and Christy, the on-site management, were wonderful hosts. Accommodations were provided at very reasonable rates by the Intermountain Christian Camp, just one mile from the resort. Some of IMSARU's trackers had attended a class there last July, before the main building was finished, but our group was treated to fifteen newly outfitted rooms. Robin, the camp manager, was still full of stories about watching people learn how to track. Thanks to everyone who came out to make the weekend a lot of fun and maybe even supply a few "awards" for the Christmas party this year!

IMSARU members participating in the entire training included Jeff Ball, Aaron Carroll, Delinda Castellon, Francisco Castellon, Jon Farr, John Ferguson, Jacob Gillis, Dan Herring, Gail Long, Aimee Hastriter, Steve Hunt, Amanda Leader, Anthony Mascola, Dell McNees, Brian Mitchell, Chad Nelson, David Oren, Matthew Page, Greg Rettschlag, Jamie Simpson, Dodi Swift, Greg Weber, and instructors Brad Acker and Mark Westerdoll.

[Editor's Note: Murphy's Law was in effect. While our members were doing snow training at Soldier Mountain, we were called to rescue a 73-year-old male and his son who had taken their ATVs too far up the Granite Creek drainage and were stuck in the snow. Fortunately, the Boise County Sheriff's Office was able to locate a couple of Forest Service personnel in the area who were able to extricate the two subjects more quickly than we could have fielded our team.]

WHAT DID WE DO IN 2012? UNIT STATISTICS COMPILED BY ROD KNOPP

In 2012 we had 17 mission calls; 11 of these ended in actual field response. (Note that it is normal for about half our calls to be resolved before we actually get to do anything to help.) There were an average of 13.8 people responding to each mission. For those where we did actively participate, we put 7,956 miles on our vehicles and our people worked 1304.4 hours. This included 32 K9 hours, 24.5 ATV hours, 14.35 snowmobile hours, 0.8 fixed-wing hours and 11 helicopter hours. (The aircraft were supplied by other agencies.) One-quarter of the subjects were juveniles; the others were adults.

The seventeen calls during the year were the lowest in the past five years. We are still speculating that it was at least partly because of the wildfires that closed roads and areas as well as blanketing many square miles with smoke.

SPRING SEARCH DOG SEMINAR, MARCH 21-24, 2013
--ANN MOSER

The IMSARU K9 Team will be hosting a search dog seminar March 21-24, 2013. The seminar is open to all Search and Rescue agencies and search dog organizations in Idaho and beyond. We are expecting 15-20 dogs for the 4-day seminar. The three instructors are evaluators and members of Tri-State K9, a “collaborative network of search dog groups and teams located throughout the Mountain West.” We will have a mix of classroom and field sessions.

On Days 1 and 2 we will focus on cadaver/human remains detection training. Beginner dogs will be introduced to the odor of human remains, while their handlers will learn correct techniques to reward their dogs. Intermediate dogs will work on indication skills, while advanced dogs and handlers will get to polish their current skills.

Days 3 and 4 will work on area search for live subjects. Beginner dogs will work on subject loyalty and learn the recall/refind. (The recall/refind is the foundation of wilderness work, in which the dog finds the subject, returns to the handler, then leads the handler back to the subject.) Intermediate dogs will begin to work large areas, while handlers will work on search strategy and navigation. Advanced dogs and handlers will work on challenging search scenarios.

We will be recruiting subjects from IMSARU members for Saturday and Sunday. We promise we will keep you warm and well-fed!

For more information, contact: Ann Moser aspengrove1012@msn.com 208-514-9265

IMSARU TECH ACADEMY
--OWEN MILLER

IMSARU will be hosting a comprehensive training course designed for anyone within IMSARU to rapidly learn all of the technical knowledge necessary to become a Rescue Technician. The training will be approximately 60 hours of hands-on field training. In addition to being a team-building exercise for the existing Tech Team, any IMSARU member who is considering joining the Tech Team can rapidly acquire the skills necessary to safely operate on almost any technical rescue we perform. This will be a wonderful opportunity to integrate into the existing Tech Team prior to our Summer MRA Recertification in September.

The training will be held on three weekends: May 17-19 (includes Friday evening orientation), June 1-2 and June 15-16. The training is open to any current field-qualified IMSARU member **who will commit to attending the entire course**. There is no other prerequisite. Although we will be paying an outside instructor, there will be no charge to our members who participate, thanks to the generous grant from The Grainger Foundation.

The mix of tech/non-tech members will determine a safe number of participants. If openings are available, invitations will be extended to other agencies.

TRACKER TRAINING – JANUARY 20, 2013 --CHARLOTTE GUNN

The IMSARU trackers try to get together for group training twice a month, but winter offers special challenges—not just cold temperatures but hard frozen ground or icy snow or freezing rain. Some topics, such as vocabulary or drawing and describing tracks, can be covered in a classroom setting, but it is hard to find an indoor space where we can actually follow a line of sign.

Dan and Kris had access to a large commercial warehouse, and set up a scenario for this session: The story was that the warehouse watchman had found an unlocked side door, locked it (from the inside) and then seen something in the warehouse that spooked him. He ran out the front door and called the police; they asked us to come and figure out what had happened.

We started outside that side door, where vehicle and human tracks in the snow indicated that two people had exited a vehicle parked beside that entrance and had also returned to it. Something had been dragged from one end (presumably the rear) of the vehicle, up the few steps to the small landing, and into the building. The two sets of footprints were of different sizes. We spent some time examining the exterior scene and finding identifying marks for the footprints. Lesson One: All of us are trained to avoid disturbing evidence and we tried to be careful, walking in single file, etc. Yet when we looked at the area after we finished, there seemed to be disturbance everywhere.

Inside the building was a fairly narrow hallway lined with empty barrels sitting on wooden pallets. Once we turned left at the end of that hallway, we were in a space with stacks of cased beverages in ranks on both sides; there were narrower side aisles between the ranks. There was dim lighting from skylights; when we turned on the overhead electric lights, it was impossible to do any tracking, so we turned them back off and relied on flashlights. A few prints were decipherable on close examination, but a flashlight beam held at an angle was much more successful. Most impressive was that such a beam angled perhaps eight to ten yards ahead caused the prints to pop into sight, while other trackers very close to the prints could not see them at all. Lessons Two and Three: The angled beam from a distance was magical. If we wanted to mark individual tracks, the person holding the flashlight would direct the person close to the track to “Move your stick out in front of you about six inches...to your left about three inches...back to your right one inch...There!” Use of a large piece of cardboard to shield the prints from the skylight illumination was somewhat successful but really narrowed the field of vision. We all agreed that tracking would be easier without the natural light but no one volunteered to go up on the roof and cover the skylights.

End of the scenario: We located the “body” that had been dumped in the warehouse by the two people.

In addition to Dan Scovel and Kris Scovel, who set up the problem, participants were Alisa Rettschlag, Tom Rand, Linda Kearney, Dan Herring and Charlotte Gunn.

THANK YOU FOR MAKING OUR WORK POSSIBLE

We have received cash donations from the following individuals and organizations:

The IDACORP Employees' Community Service Fund

The Hewlett-Packard Payroll Donations of employees and matching funds from H-P

Women of the Rotary

Ms. Janet Boss

Ronald and Krystyna Fry

Patricia Wilcomb

Johnny and Clarine Hastriter

A very generous grant from The Grainger Foundation to underwrite training expenses.

Donations from the following were given in memory of Diana Kay Fields:

Major Richard and Mrs. Janice Dees

The Rebmann Family of Gettysburg, PA

We greatly appreciate this public support. Idaho Mountain Search and Rescue Unit, Inc. is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit corporation. All our members are unpaid volunteers and we have no paid staff. We respond whenever and wherever we are requested by law enforcement agencies, and we never charge those whom we are called to help.

M.R.A. RECERTIFICATION PLANS --OWEN MILLER

IMSARU's Summer Skills recertification with the M.R.A. is tentatively set for the weekend of September 14-15. We are working with the Intermountain Region reps to arrange for evaluators to come to Boise for the testing. The test scenarios will be at either the ID-21 High Bridge at Lucky Peak or along Blacks Creek Road headed toward Prairie. (The evaluators asked us to select two locations and they will choose which one so that they can add an element of surprise to the scenario.)

The skills we will be tested on are: (1) Individual technical skills (we will select five Tech Team members to complete this station), (2) High angle rescue, (3) Low angle rescue and (4) Search. The first three tests listed will be completed by qualified Tech Team members, but we may need non-Tech Team members to act as subjects. All members are welcome to observe. All members are invited to participate in the final test, Search.

SPECIAL TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

We pride ourselves on our training program, routinely scheduling classroom training for the whole unit on the second Tuesday of each month and following that with field training of the same skill(s) on the following weekend. Each specialty team also sets an additional schedule for its members; in addition, individuals (especially K9 teams and mantrackers) also pay their own expenses to attend professional training seminars. Our annual statistics show about three person-hours of training for each person-hour spent on missions.

This year, thanks to a generous grant from The Grainger Foundation, donations via the IDACORP Employees' Community Service Fund, and many other gifts, we are bringing in professional instructors for a variety of special training sessions. See articles in this issue.

ADDITIONAL PHOTOS



Explanation of avalanche search techniques.
—Photo by D. Swift



Tom with two new additions to K9 team—
CPR training manikins.



Jimmie receiving the
grant check from The Grainger Foundation from Jorge
Gonzalez and Boise
Branch Manager Jennifer Thurman

More avalanche Training

