

IDAHO MOUNTAIN SEARCH AND RESCUE UNIT, INC. Boise, Idaho

Rescue



Web Edition

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Press on the calendar to see upcoming events

SPOT BEACON DISTRESS SIGNAL NEAR HARRIS CREEK SUMMIT MARCH 22-23, 2015 --ALISA RETTSCHLAG

Gregg and I were watching a movie when the phone rang; it was the IMSARU number so I expected to hear the usual “Dhung Dhung! We have a mission!” But it was Rod in person, telling Gregg that two ATVs had set off a SPOT beacon three times: the first said “We need help,” the second said “We’re OK,” and the third said “We need help.” So we DID have a mission: Two men on ATVs stranded near Harris Creek Summit; both had medical issues, one being a paraplegic who may have been out of his medical supplies and medications.

We quickly packed and went POV to Harris Creek Summit near Horseshoe Bend, arriving around 2200 hours. Boise County Deputy Steve Dora summarized what Rod had told Gregg, adding that the paraplegic’s meds were most likely in his truck, which they had not yet located. I gathered my gear and donned my headlamp while Gregg formulated a plan to reach the subjects. The SPOT seemed to be close to the Boise Ridge Road—which Harris Creek Road would connect into. I would hop on an ATV and the ATV driver and I would go meet the subjects—easy peasy!



Don Fridrich showed up and unloaded his ATV; I hopped on and away we went. We hit increasingly deeper snowfields on the road; in the third one, the ATV bogged down. Don and I shoveled and pushed and pulled; finally got the ATV turned around to return to base...we just weren’t going to get through via that road on an ATV.

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When we got back to base, more members had arrived with additional ATVs and our unit truck. Gregg handed over the O.L. role to Dan and they had a pow-wow to discuss a plan. Gregg bread-crumbed a route on the computer, using the multitude of roads in this area that would reach the subjects fastest, and downloaded this route onto our GPSs. Don and Craig took us up the Harris Creek Road as far as they could, and we started hiking—just Gregg and I. As we hiked, I had to keep reminding myself that this was a mission, not just a beautiful night hike with my favorite hiking partner. Even with the blustery weather that came through around midnight, I couldn't believe how much fun this was—a hike at night, in the sleet and dark. It just does not get better than this!

We reached the location—no one there. Base gave us a new location, just down and below our current location. We tried various roads that my GPS showed, ending at a swath of somewhat cleared area that might be another road directly down to our new destination. Walking down this steep cut, we called out “Hello!” and heard someone calling back, “Hello! We're down here!” We had found them!

Both subjects were stable and fairly warm. One sat in his ATV with the heater on; the other had started a fire and was huddled by it. We put a tarp up on the driver's side of the ATV to block the wind, removed a damp towel from over his legs and replaced it with one of our fleece blankets. We also stoked the fire for the other subject, who had initially refused any kind of blanket or shelter; he eventually got into one of our bivvy bags and went to sleep.

Just before daybreak, the radio squawked that a National Guard helicopter was on its way. We woke our subjects, packed up our gear, tied things down and re-inspected a potential landing zone that we thought might work. As the sky lightened, we heard the helicopter. It attempted to land in our LZ but the LZ was just a bit too small. Man, those guys are brave! The helo then lowered one of their technicians, who came and talked us through the plan.

The subject in the ATV drove down to where the technician indicated; we lifted him from his ATV and got him set on the penetrator. The other subject then drove the ATV away. The helo returned, hovered, and connected with the technician and the first subject; up they went on the penetrator. The second subject walked back to the pickup location, the technician strapped him onto the penetrator and up they went. The helicopter dropped the subjects off at a designated location where another IMSARU team waited to take them to their truck.

As for Gregg and myself, we waved goodbye to the helicopter, donned our packs and started hiking back. Our incredibly dedicated teammates waited for us at the deep snowfield and gave us a lift on ATVs the rest of the way back to base. There we said goodbye to return home. It was a great way to spend a Sunday night/Monday morning!

IMSARU members participating included Aaron Burdin, Don Fridrich, Steve Hunt, Bill Lindenau, Mitch Pelham, Alisa Rettschlag, Gregg Rettschlag, Eric Rust, Dan Scovel, Craig Swan, Ken Swickard and Jimmie Yorgensen. In-town coordinator was Rod Knopp.



3 cheers for the National Guard —Photo by K. Swickard

**SAFETY ED FOR DONNELLY SNOWMOBILE CLUB--MARCH 11, 2015
--KEN SWICKARD**

President Greg Clovis invited us to present a Wilderness Safety class at the Birds of Prey Motorsports complex in Caldwell. Ken explained the history of IMSARU and our mission statement. After Vicki presented the Rules of 3, Craig explained the Ten Essentials while Ken unpacked his winter 48-hour pack and showed the contents as examples.

Vicki gave handouts on the subject of “Cotton Kills,” unit brochures, the “Code of Responsibility for Outdoor Activities,” and our latest newsletter. There was active discussion throughout the presentation and, when leaving after the meeting, many told us how they were going to change their clothing selection and build a new survival bag. (We stayed through the entire meeting—including partaking of sandwiches and soft drinks.)

IMSARU presenters were Craig Swan, Ken Swickard and Vicki Swickard.

**KUNA MIDDLE SCHOOL “AFTER SCHOOL” PROGRAM
SAFETY EDUCATION – APRIL 2, 2015
--KEN SWICKARD**

Cathy Gealy invited IMSARU to present a safety program to 7th and 8th graders and their parents at the bi-monthly parent/student dinner. Ken started the program with an introduction of IMSARU and a short historical presentation of our unit. Vicki addressed the group about the Rules of Three. Craig presented a brief explanation of the dangers of cotton clothing, and the Ten Essentials as Ken provided show-and-tell from his 48-hour pack. Liz finished the evening with an age-appropriate presentation of Hug-A-Tree and demonstrated proper survival techniques. Aaron, Drew and Stephanie handed out our pamphlets and brochures, and whistles and mirrors donated by the Jon Francis Foundation.

One of the teachers related to us that she and her younger son were at our presentation to this same group last summer. In the fall, her husband and two boys, including the younger one, went hiking and could not find their way back to the vehicle. As it got dark and the father was trying to figure out which way to go, the son said “Stop. Just wait here next to this tree like the Search and Rescue people taught us.” That is what they did and within two hours of sun-up, the Forest Service Rangers found them. It was noted that the father was actually moving away from the vehicle and she firmly believes that what her son learned from our program prevented a very long and questionable rescue.

IMSARU presenters were Aaron Burdin, Stephanie Jenkins, Drew Nienstedt, Craig Swan, Liz Swan, Ken Swickard and Vicki Swickard.

WINTER SHELTER & TRAVEL TRAINING—FEBRUARY 14-15, 2015 THE WARM SIDE – JEN SKELDON

I love winter recreation—peaceful snow-covered scenery, trips on skinny skis and snowshoes—and I love backpacking and camping...but NOT in the snow. However, after the Pilot Peak mission a few weeks earlier it was imperative to spend ONE night out and assess the gear I carry to better plan a well-equipped winter pack. So I made a packing list, taking into account everything one could want when spending a cold, wet, miserable night outside and packed my gear. My dog Kato carried his own pack, the temperature was in the 50s and the sun was out as I snowshoed up to the site.

After assessing what other experienced (aka crazy) members were building, the temperature and Kato's overnight requirements, Nikki and I decided to dig a trench, taco ourselves into our tarps, bivys, sleeping bags with liners and maybe cover our pit with a tarp. Kato would sleep between us.

Once our pit was dug we practiced our beacon skills, watched the tech team create snow anchors (COOL!) and got a little sun before our eventual doom of freezing overnight. It was a clear night and the temperature dropped quickly after sunset. Alisa built a fire; we cooked and talked. Kato was tired from stealing firewood and coaxing everyone to play with him; he curled up in his jammies on his bed. (Yes, I'm that kind of dog handler. ☺) We all turned in around 9 p.m. and there was a fine frosting on everything. I climbed in, situated a tired pup and prepared for sleep. After a few hours, I re-evaluated as I felt a wet nose attempting to climb into my sleeping bag to snuggle. It wasn't too cold, it wasn't too wet, not even miserable! Odd. I had shoved a few hand-warmers inside my sleeping bag and after a few hours I was TOO WARM with my many layers. I was dry, fairly comfortable, and woke up when it started to get light outside.

After a beautiful sunrise and a snack we packed up and hiked down to the trucks. Driving home, we discussed what we would do differently next time: more or fewer layers, different tarp, food, etc. # One from me: Have a better attitude about snow overnights. It was a wonderful time with an incredible group of people and an experience I wouldn't get anywhere else!

IMSARU members participating were Aaron Burdin, Francisco Castellon, Ron Christensen, Nikki Contreras, Brandon Mart, Dell McNeese, Tom Rand, Alisa Rettschlag, Gregg Rettschlag, Jacob Robinson, Jen Skeldon, and R.T. Thompson.

WINTER SHELTER & TRAVEL TRAINING—FEBRUARY 14-15, 2015 THE COLD QUINZHEE – BRANDON MART

A desert rat by nature, I had only camped in the snow two or three times prior, but had done it—set up the tent, crawl inside the winter bag, and get through it. This time there would be no canvas tent or inflatable mattress. I wanted to prove to my unit members and myself that I was capable of bedding down in the snow with the contents of my ruck: a snow shovel, a tarp, an old de-

graded foam pad from the 1970's and a fleece bivvy bag; I would also take my 15-degree synthetic bag as an option.

I had learned several times how to make a Quinzhee hut, AKA powder house, AKA hollowed-out pile of snow...but always in a classroom. A few days before the field training, I remembered our training director citing an expectation that the majority of people would be building Quinzhee huts. "Well, that's that," I thought. I was going to build one, too.

We arrived at the saddle of Mores Creek Summit in the late morning of a beautiful Saturday in the mountains, with clear skies, low winds and fairly warm temperatures. I looked at the elevation gain we were about to ascend, back at my pack and snowshoes, and stripped down to my base layer as we began our avalanche tests in the snow. We soon embarked, and ten minutes later I was glad I had listened to the voices in my head, as I was steaming.

The hike up was beautiful. Our training director provided the entertainment, towing a snow sled full of ropes and technical equipment behind him via a harness. Legs like a horse, I tell ya! We arrived at a wide-open flat area, determined we would set up camp here, and so it began. I measured the snow depth at about 110cm, with several layers of ice—not ideal snow conditions, so I quickly began piling snow. My plan was to build a hut big enough for me to stand in and sleep at least two; I wanted a fallback for any teammates who might end up needing a place to sleep due to failed shelters. Having built snow caves in powdery snow before provided me with the optimism. Plans changed when I discovered the snow conditions were far from "powdery."

It took about 45 minutes to pile the inconsistent snow, varying from light patches of powder to sheets of ice where a layer had previously melted--up to a formidable depth of 170cm. Standing 6 feet tall, I would need about 220cm of snow depth to be able to stand in it. I decided to abandon the "stand in it" feature and switch my focus to hollowing it out. Looking around before starting my excavation, I noticed that I was the only one building a Quinzhee hut. From tents to trenches to creative A-frame snow block builds, it seemed the majority had more advanced knowledge than I did of what snow conditions were ideal for a Quinzhee hut. Some were already finishing their shelters, it was well past noon, and I had just a pile of snow.

One foot into the excavation, I discovered a bush was living in my snow pile. Working around it was prohibitive, so I got out my saw and cut it down. Another foot in, and another bush: I was in a sagebrush field. As I entered hour three of excavation, I had a nice little cubby about three feet wide and four feet deep. The sintered snow and ice was hardened and unable to be shoveled, so I had to cut chunks with my small saw and move them outside. It did not help that I was hungry, thirsty and covered in moisture from sweat and melting snow. It was time to abandon the grandiose plans I had and just focus on preparing one shelf wide enough for me. Hour four came and passed. I did a very quick sleeping simulation, lying down in my now 6ft wide by 6ft deep by 4ft tall snow cave. "Good enough," I said, exited, and began the process of drying out and replenishing myself. The rest of the evening consisted of a technical training exercise, an MRE, and time staring at the campfire. It was 1930 before I knew it, but felt like 2300 to me—time to enjoy the fruits of my labor. I crawled into my hut, stood my snowshoes in the doorway as a wind block, rolled into my snow cot...and realized my hasty simulation

wasn't good enough. The walls were almost exactly 6ft wide, meaning my head, feet and sleeping gear would be contacting ice if I lay flat on my back. I admitted defeat, bent my legs and tried sleeping on my side through a cold, long night. My best estimate is that I slept about 40 minutes between 2030 and 0730.

One may think this whole experience sounds like a bad time. It's all in the perspective, and how you interpret it is unique to you. For me, the experience was absolutely worth it. I learned so much about Quinzhee huts, ice, snow, digging, snow, sleep deprivation, ice and snow. Jokes aside, I really am grateful for the experience. It taught me what it takes to build one of these shelters in conditions that don't encourage it. I found new confidence and insight amongst the stresses and physical labors, and look forward to exploring any shelter option but a Quinzhee hut next year.

JHPTS TRAIN THE TRAINERS SESSION – MARCH 21-22 --CHARLOTTE GUNN

The annual Train the Trainers meeting of the Joel Hardin Professional Tracking Services was again hosted by Dan and Kris at the Hayden Beverages facility. Trainers and instructors from across the country met together to get to know each other and to learn of changes in the program as Joel continues to work on his five-year plan for retirement. (This is approximately year nine of that plan.) The days were full of serious work; the evenings were spent in socializing and informal discussions. In addition to personal introductions and discussions of materials and procedures, Kathy Decker (who is a law enforcement officer as well as a Signcutter-level tracker) presented a challenging crime scene case that she had worked, including the multiple resources that worked together to locate the burial site. And Joel introduced the members of the newly-formed JHPTS Board, who will be taking over organizational roles as he decreases his time spent in that capacity. We are proud to note that our Kris Scovel is one of those board members.

Again this year, Dan and Kris were great hosts; they not only provided a comfortable meeting room for about 50 people, but also made sure we had snacks, beverages, and catered meals. IMSARU members attending were Jimmie Yorgensen, Kris Scovel, Dan Scovel, Alisa Rettschlag, Siw Lea, Linda Kearney and Charlotte Gunn.



Additional photos from the Harris Creek rescue mission: The missing men's bivouac and part of the search crew.
Photos by G. Rettschlag and K. Swickard

MRA RECERTIFICATION OF RAVALLI COUNTY, MARCH 27-28 —GREGG RETTSCHLAG

The Mountain Rescue Association requires its member groups to recertify in both summer and winter disciplines every four years. Having just successfully completed IMSARU's tests, three of us headed to Montana to work as junior evaluators at the Ravalli County SAR winter recertification. Leaving Boise in early morning and arriving in time to spend a beautiful Friday evening in Darby, the 70-degree temps didn't exactly set the mood for a winter re-cert, but we knew there was plenty of snow at the testing site. And the beautiful Bitterroot Valley decided to up the ante a bit by Saturday morning, with strong winds, rain and cooler temps.

At Lost Trail Pass ski area, lead evaluators Patrick Bentley and Eric Gunnerson from Cache County SAR (Logan, Utah) briefed us on the scenario and our roles as evaluators. Mike worked with command, Francisco with medical and I with snow travel and avalanche search. In challenging conditions including strong wind gusts and falling snow, the Ravalli team managed an avalanche scene that included an "injured subject"; they had to manage the injuries, package him in a sled, and raise him to the top of the slope with a full technical system using snow anchors...and with several interruptions from the evaluators to introduce complications.

A short debrief started with the tension-relieving "YOU PASSED" and then moved on to a discussion of what we saw. We then moved to a short steep hillside for the individual skills, with each evaluator responsible for a specific station. Mike had everyone traversing the slope using proper ice axe technique ("Don't forget, two points of contact at all times!"); Francisco covered safe snow travel and hypothermia assessment/treatment; and I evaluated use of a seated hip belay to safely lower another member down the steep hillside. Once again the Ravalli folks were solid, and we were able to wrap things up by midafternoon.

Peer-review is a necessary part of MRA credentialing, and a re-cert like this provides us the opportunity to see how others do things. We brought new and different concepts back to our unit. I've participated in three recertifications as a member of the team being evaluated, but this was my first time through the process as an evaluator. The education is not limited to the person or group being tested. It is definitely a two-way street, and I think all three of us look forward to future opportunities to work as evaluators.

IMSARU evaluators were Francisco Castellon, Mike Johnson and Gregg Rettschlag.

**“TEEN MANIA” SAFETY EDUCATION – JANUARY 31, 2015
--KEN SWICKARD**

“Teen Mania,” a group of older 4-H members, was planning a wilderness hiking/camping trip and we were asked to help prepare for packing—basically, our Ten Essentials. We met 14 young adults ranging from 7th to 12th graders, at the United Methodist Church in Caldwell, with an hour for our presentation.

Liz opened the session by explaining who we are and what we do. Vicki then presented the Rules of Three to the group. As Liz and Vicki explained each of the 10 essentials and their importance, Ken disassembled his 24-hour pack to show the articles.

IMSARU presenters were Liz Swan, Ken Swickard and Vicki Swickard.

THANK YOU! THANK YOU! THANK YOU!

We very much appreciate the cash donations from:

Marc Buursink – in tribute to George Gunn

Eric Rust

The Greg Clovis Family

Sarah J. Lofthus

John W. Banks, Margaret Bibbey, Wendy Christopher and Gregory Smith who donated via the 2014 Combined Federal Campaign

AlSCO of Boise generously donated linens for use in our medical-assistance events such as the Race to Robie Creek and on missions where we transport injured subjects.

WORK DAY AT THE COMPOUND

Spring clean-up time is near! We need to clear out trash and overgrown bushes around the old front building and the miscellaneous stuff from the interior. Justin will bring in the equipment to remove the remains of the former building next to the office and strong arms with shovels will be in demand to spread gravel. Depending on how many workers show up, this may also be the time to rearrange equipment in the garage and manicure our small lawn and flower bed...or at least rake up the edges of the property. Please plan to attend in work clothes with shovels, rakes, clippers and work gloves. There will be more information about the plans during meetings.

And yes, this is partly prompted by our hopes of being able to restore the old front building into an adequate meeting room for our expanding membership!

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WINTER SKILLS MRA RE-CERTIFICATION—MARCH 21, 2015 --FRANCISCO CASTELLON

The MRA re-certification process has evaluators set up scenarios in two fields: avalanche rescue, and steep angle raising and lowering. There is also a medical and personal skills component where some individuals are quizzed and asked to display knowledge of safe snow travel, snow anchors, self-arrest techniques, impromptu in-snow belays and hypothermia.

Our evaluators came up from Utah, two from Cache County and two from Utah County. They chose an area by Bogus Basin which still had enough snow and a long steep slope for the event, and prepared a scenario that incorporated an avalanche search with a technical rescue component. Shortly after our group arrived at the parking lot, one of the evaluators told us the scenario and we began the avalanche search for two missing people. Our group had located both “victims” within minutes; one had unfortunately not survived and the remaining subject needed to be evacuated back to the top of the hill. This required a technical rope raise of over 450 feet, so it took about two hours to complete that part of the test. After a short lunch break, six of our rescue specialists went through the personal skills test.



The evaluators expressed their satisfaction with the way IMSARU performed in the scenario and the personal skills tests. We all felt we had done a great job in our preparation for the day and were thoroughly satisfied to have successfully completed yet another re-certification. We would like to express our gratitude to Bogus Basin for letting us use their facilities, to Mark

Westerdoll for helping make arrangements with the folks at Bogus Basin, and to Utah and Cache Counties for sending evaluators for our group.

IMSARU members in attendance were Brad Acker, Chris Brookman, Delinda Castellon, Francisco Castellon, Ron Christensen, John Ferguson, Dan Herring, Mike Johnson, Owen Miller, Jeff Munn, Tom Rand, Gregg Rettschlag, Dodi Sallee and Greg Weber.

[Editor’s Note: Since our Technical Director had such a heavy travel schedule for his work this winter/early Spring, Francisco was in charge of getting our tech team ready for this re-cert. Thank you, Francisco, for stepping up and leading the way.]

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