

Accidents

*Analysis from the White Mountains of
New Hampshire and occasionally elsewhere*

AS LAST SUMMER'S IMAGES OF OPEN TRAILS AND LATE LIGHT FADED into early December's long nights, three of us, former and current editors of this journal, gathered at Cardigan Lodge to teach "Writing from the Mountains," an Appalachian Mountain Club workshop. We were joined there at road's end by fifteen writers and by early-advent winter. For the second year in a row, we found significant snow and cold in the folds of the Shem Valley; on the second night the temperature dipped to zero. The workshop seeks its words and sentences along the many trails that fan out from the lodge, and from the two parent mountains—Cardigan and Firescrew—that rise sharply above. On the second morning as I walked along the Manning Trail, I noticed that already we and others had shaped the beginning of a beaten ridge down the trail's center, and that moment cast me both back and forward to one of hiking's least-favored words, *monorail*.

A monorail is a singular, raised track of old snow and ice that persists down the center of popular trails. The surging popularity of winter hiking, climbing, and skiing (not to mention their variants), aided by ever-better clothing and footwear, has put many more feet on the winter trails. Those feet beat the snow into a compact mass after every storm. It's rare now to find a popular trail unbroken—uncompacted—more than 24 hours after the snow stops falling. So, by the time serious melt sets in, there has been a lot of traffic along any route. That traffic also often continues in the "mud season" that most once avoided. Hence, the monorail, a dense, icy, sometimes undermined track that goes right up the trail's center and slopes down to its edges. Especially on trails facing away from the day's sun, a monorail may make it all the way to summer solstice.

Which brings me to this column covering May 1 through October 31, 2019. Winter 2018–2019 still gripped many slopes in the White Mountains when the calendar paged forward into May. But warmth in the valleys and general spring euphoria suggested otherwise, especially to those who live

south of the mountains. Spring's hikers arrived geared for a season that hadn't yet reached the high peaks and north slopes of the Whites. There followed a spate of early May rescues, a number of which had trailed our old friend "monorail" into trouble.

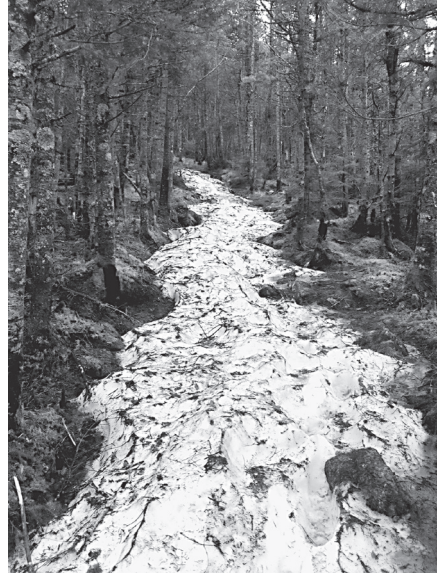
In the spring of 2019, monorails were everywhere in the White Mountains. Their presence wasn't new or news, but their prevalence was news of the quiet sort.

May Days: 5/8–5/13, 5 Calls

The Mount Washington Observatory's weather archives record the following statistics for May 8 to 13, 2019: high temperatures: 27, 42, 44, 32, 31, 28 Fahrenheit; lows: 18, 20, 27, 18, 17, 19 F; average wind speed: 38, 18, 50, 53, 20, 34 MPH; precipitation: 0, 0.04, 0.85, 0.10, 0, 0.07 inch. The Mount Washington summit, where these were recorded, has its own extremes, but its proximity to the sites of these five rescues at least gives us a sense of their weathers. These figures are not especially severe for Mount Washington. Still, it's easy to see that if you are under-equipped, marooned, and wet in the snow and darkness, and in some cases, unshod, you are near deep trouble.

Incident 1, Falling Waters Trail below Franconia Ridge: Monorails are hard walking and symbolize winter's endurance. Not only do they slough off water and resist melting, they slough us off too, especially if we are wearing summer shoes. As New Hampshire Fish and Game's Lt. Jim Kneeland put it in a press release about this May 8 incident, "Microspikes are still a necessity as the trails packed over the winter are last to thaw causing icy traveling."

An 8:40 P.M. call on May 8 asked NHFG to go to the assistance of Jevin M., a 22-year-old hiker from



In spring, after a season of foot-beating on popular White Mountain trails, a "monorail" of compacted snow and ice often persists. ARI OFSEVIT

Florida, who reported that he had lost the Falling Waters Trail while descending and was stuck. Once off trail, Jevin had come finally upon Dry Brook, and he had used the water course as a route to hike back up until he could get cell service to call for help. That brook-work had gotten Jevin wet, and the deep snow had stripped off his boots. Temperatures were forecast to drop into the low 30s overnight.

Kneeland summoned and sent a team of two NHFG conservation officers to coordinates derived from Jevin's cell phone call. The COs reached Jevin at 1 A.M. and supplied him with dry clothing, footwear, food, a headlamp, and—as Kneeland noted—“motivation.” After thrashing through thick cover and deep snow, the threesome reached the trail and, finally, the parking lot at 4:10 A.M. Jevin declined any further medical attention.

In a press release, Kneeland outlined just how ill-prepared Jevin was for his hike: “He did not know he would encounter snow and ice on his hike. He also wore primarily cotton clothing, which is one of the worst fabrics to wear in cold, wet conditions.” Kneeland also said he carried only two of the hikeSafe program's “ten essentials,” a knife and a whistle, lacking map, compass, warm clothing, extra food and water, a light source, matches, first aid kit, and rain gear.

Comment: This incident is common in many respects: an out-of-state hiker sets out to enjoy White Mountain spring and finds a different season. He persists, even as he is woefully underprepared. Climbing up over bad footing is easier than descending. On the way down, he gets off trail and mired in snow, which, finally, keeps first one boot, then the other. By the time rescue arrives he is wet, cold, and shoeless on a night when hypothermia is a given. In short, he gets his life saved.

Here's the kicker: As of this writing, the detailed, official report has not been released because Jevin is contesting being charged as negligent for the cost of his rescue. That gets him included in this column.

Incident 2, the Baldfaces: Less than 24 hours later, NHFG's call-line rang again. It was late in the day, and the light was fading. The caller, Zachary S., age 26, said that he had lost the trail somewhere between North Baldface and South Baldface. Now, he was mired in knee-deep snow, out of food and water, without a headlamp or extra, dry clothing; he wanted help. Despite the poor phone connection, NHFG was able to receive coordinates that placed Zachary just over three miles from the trailhead. Lt. Brad Morse summoned two COs, and at 9:05 P.M., they climbed into the night.

Just after 11:30 P.M., the COs reached Zachary, provided him with food, water, and a headlamp, and then guided him down, arriving at the trailhead at 1:50 A.M. Morse's interview with Zachary found that he had left for the 9.6-mile circuit at 10 A.M. on the 9th, "carrying a small pack with only some extra water, food, and socks. . . . He had no map, compass, added layers of clothing, traction devices, snowshoes, and headlamp."

Comment: Lt. Morse recommended that the state bill Zachary for the cost of the rescue, as he had acted "negligently in that he knowingly hiked a long and difficult trail while unprepared for the conditions." I concur with this recommendation, even as billing for rescue continues to be a controversial subject. While I have written at some length in the past that the right to bill for rescue costs offers a false promise of helping fund NHFG's growing search-and-rescue budget, I believe that in incidents where hiker negligence is clear, billing can act as a deterrent to others. That is true *if* it is used judiciously and publicized. Morse, a veteran rescuer cited often by the rescue community for his skill, is a trusted voice in this respect. (See "End Note" in this column for a few further thoughts about billing.)

The circuit Zachary attempted is a demanding one, even in warm, dry-rock conditions. On a cool, early May day with abundant snow and ice still in the shaded sections, it's a route only the most capable and experienced should try.

Incident 3, Falling Waters Trail: This short account could describe any of the region's most common rescues. On May 10 at 8:42 P.M. NHFG got a call about a hiker benighted on the Falling Waters Trail. Jason R., age 49, had taken a wrong turn near the end of his loop hike, and, without a light, map, or rain gear, had called for help. A NHFG CO hiked in, provided Jason with a light, and the pair reached the trailhead at 10:30 P.M.

Comment: I include this incident for its timing with the other four, its frequency, and because, as of this writing, Jason was contesting NHFG's request that he pay rescue costs on the basis of his negligence. Really?

Incident 4, Mount Moosilauke: May 11 began innocuously enough for an introductory hiking and camping class of Dartmouth College students, who set out to climb Mount Moosilauke as part of the culmination of a physical education course. By 8:30 A.M. the group had gone 1.5 miles up the Gorge Brook Trail, and Arun A. (age not reported) decided to turn back. He was concerned that his mesh sneakers were inadequate, and he spoke with one

of the group leaders before heading back down alone. The rest of the group continued up and completed their hike in the afternoon. At some point late in the day, people noticed that Arun was missing. NHFG got the call at around 8 P.M. Lt. Jim Kneeland set about organizing a series of night searches with volunteers from Pemigewasset Valley Search and Rescue Team, Upper Valley Search and Rescue, Lakes Region Search and Rescue, and New England K-9 Search and Rescue. When these searches turned up nothing, NHFG set about planning for the 12th.

Kneeland then called in NHFG Sgt. Thomas Dakai to take over the search, and he further suggested that Dakai summon Lt. Mark Ober to help. Working with Civil Air Patrol's cellular phone forensics team, Ober was able to determine that Arun had tried to call 911 at 9:38 A.M., about an hour after he had turned around, but that call had contained no voice content and had been dropped. The 911 dispatchers attempted to call him back, but that call did not go through. A member of the Dartmouth hiking party got a call around this time, but the call dropped and no message came through. Arun's father had received a blank text message about the same time, so he thought his son was trying to send a routine note about the hike. Arun was out overnight.

The 911 system had received coordinates from Arun's dropped call. Arun was off trail near the Gorge Brook Trail. (Plugging those coordinates into Google Earth gave me a location a quarter-mile west of the Gorge Brook Trail at about 3,000 feet.) Early on the morning of the 12th, a team had conducted a line search (in which a group of searchers work their way through an area as a moving line, always staying together and checking every bit of ground). But they neither found nor heard any sign of Arun.

A water bottle found near that same area late on the 12th turned out to be a bottle Arun had borrowed for the hike. For a second night, darkness fell without Arun being found. More search plans formed for the 13th. At around 9:30 A.M., a party ascending to their search area came upon Arun on the Gorge Brook Trail, shoeless and hypothermic, working his way down. Searchers helped him down the short distance to the Ravine Lodge, where he was met by an ambulance that took him for treatment at Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center. Arun recovered fully.

Comment and Aftermath: This incident seems as tangled as the snow-packed undergrowth hobbling the search. It points—among other lessons—to the way “lost” can be only yards away from “found,” especially in terrain made denser still by soft, deep snow.

We can dispense with the Dartmouth party's mistakes quickly: They allowed an inexperienced hiker to begin a demanding hike in inadequate footwear and without necessary gear. When Arun wanted to go down, the party's leader let him do so alone. Witnesses said that Arun said he'd go down on his own. The Gorge Brook Trail is avenue-wide for part of the way, but clearly he needed an escort. It then took some time after everyone had returned for anyone to note Arun's absence, so the search didn't get underway until early evening, when later cell phone evidence showed that Arun knew he was in trouble by 9:30 A.M., when he tried to call for help.

Dartmouth acknowledged these problems by initiating a thorough review of their outdoor programs and volunteering to pay \$19,000 for search costs before NHFG could request any payment. Coincident with Dartmouth's report outlining a number of improvements needed in its program, the school's newspaper, *The Dartmouth*, reported that the program's director had resigned.

What makes this a cautionary tale is the way someone can go missing in what seems a small area and still not be found by a skilled and determined richness of search groups. As noted in the incident narrative, a plotting of the coordinates of Arun's attempted calls early on the 11th, when only he knew he was in trouble, suggests that he was within a quarter mile of the trail.

During his post-rescue interview with Sgt. Dakai, Arun said that, after he left the group and while he was heading down, he had been fiddling with his phone. When he looked up, he said, he had lost the trail. This summons a common picture from city streets and one I've begun to see on mountain trails: the bent-necked posture of a cell phone walker-watcher, who stays in motion but tracks what's happening on the screen rather than underfoot.

Trading the actual world for the screened one invites collision with objects such as trees, stones, or mailboxes. But the loss of awareness of one's real world is deeper than that. The screen life becomes the familiar one; the real life becomes surpassingly strange. It is, some screen-involved steps later, like coming awake in the land of a dream. How did I get here? you wonder. That question is, of course, at the heart of being lost.

Arun said he survived the 11th and 12th by finding a secure or known place near a stream and then striking out from it to seek the trail. When he found no trail, he would return to his secure spot. In essence, Arun was staying put, thereby diminishing his chances of getting more deeply lost, and waiting for help. By the morning of the 13th, he felt that he would perish if he stayed put any longer, and so he set out, finding the Gorge Brook Trail, where he was found by searchers.

Statistics combed from the official NHFG report on the three-day search between May 11 and 13 point to the scope of that effort. Twenty-three COs were joined by 60 volunteers from PVSART, UVSAR, LRSAR, and New England K-9. Also aiding the search were helicopter crews from the New Hampshire Army National Guard and the Dartmouth-Hitchcock Advanced Response Team. NHFG COs alone drove a total of 5,383 miles on this call.

This account ends with a mystery within a mystery. On the first night, Lt. Kneeland had line searchers go through that area and several K-9 teams were also in the area. Kneeland wrote to me, “I think he parked himself near a small stream that he mentions [in his account to NHFG], and it is possible the flowing water covered the sounds made by searchers. The line search team comprised Upper Valley Wilderness Response Team members, and they continually blow whistles and make noise. It doesn’t seem possible that he didn’t hear them. It is possible that he was further from the trail than I think, and he may have been out of the search area, but I don’t think so due to the depth of the snow.”

Incident 5, Mount Isolation area: The same difficult conditions that plagued the previous four incidents stymied Kyle W., age 26, and Kenneth B., age 27, during an ambitious hike on May 11 up the Glen Boulder Trail. They planned to climb Mount Isolation and return. As the day ebbed, Kyle and Kenneth contacted Kyle’s mother to let her know that they were off trail and stuck somewhere near the Davis Path and its spur path up Mount Isolation. Just before 8 P.M., she got in touch with authorities and offered coordinates she had received in a text from her son, placing the two friends where they had suspected they were, near Mount Isolation, almost five miles by trail from the nearest road. Authorities advised Kyle’s mother to have her son call 911, which Kyle was able to do at 10:20 P.M.

Dispatchers patched him through to NHFG’s Lt. Mark Ober. Ober learned that Kyle and Kenneth were mired in deep snow amid many blow-downs, and, though they thought the Davis Path was nearby, they couldn’t find it. The pair reported also that they had sufficient equipment and supplies to spend the night, which they agreed to do. The three agreed that Kyle and Kenneth would try to find their way out in the morning.

On the morning of the 12th, Ober, who had been called in to help with the search for Arun A. on Mount Moosilauke (see earlier), turned this incident over to CO Matthew Holmes. Holmes’s thorough incident report details a persistent, and finally successful, effort from Kyle and Kenneth to get themselves out of the aptly named Mount Isolation area. It also describes

the equally persistent efforts of two Androscoggin Valley Search and Rescue rescuers, who fought their way along the same decaying snows and vanishing trails to the site where Kyle and Kenneth had camped on the 11th. Carl Herz and Steve Dupuis confirmed that the trail was indeed very hard to follow in the snow and through extensive blowdowns.

Holmes had called AVSAR early that morning, hoping for some volunteers to check the Glen Boulder and Rocky Branch Trails. He got the gold standard in Herz and Dupuis; they agreed to meet at the Glen Boulder trailhead at 10 A.M. At 9:40, Kyle's father arrived at the trailhead, bringing with him news of an early morning phone call with his son. Kyle had said that he and Kenneth were up, fine, and going to try to reach the Glen Boulder Trail. Herz and Dupuis climbed away at 10:20 A.M., with a plan to search the Glen Boulder Trail and then the Davis Path going south to the Mount Isolation Trail; from there, if they had not found Kyle and Kenneth, the pair would aim for the coordinates of the prior night's encampment.

AVSAR members Herz and Dupuis climbed rapidly, and around 1 P.M., they reported by radio that they were near the intersection with the Davis Path and working hard to get through deep snow. By a 2:30 P.M. check-in, the pair was approximately a mile from Kenneth and Kyle's campsite and finding the way very difficult.

By 3 P.M. CO Holmes had no new information, and he conferred with NHFG Sgt. Alex Lopashanski, who, upon completing a call, planned to join Holmes. Holmes also called NHFG's Law Enforcement Division leader, Colonel Kevin Jordan, who authorized Holmes to ask for a NHANG helicopter. That help would be forthcoming, but only after the helicopter completed its search for Arun A. on Mount Moosilauke (see Incident 4).

At 3:20 P.M. Holmes learned from Kyle's father that, after not relocating the Glen Boulder Trail, his son and Kenneth had taken a compass bearing and headed due east along it. At 3:55 P.M. Dupuis and Herz reached the prior night's campsite, but amid the many tracks couldn't tell which way Kyle and Kenneth has finally gone.

A 4:25 P.M. call from Sgt. Lopashanski finally got through to Kyle, who said he and Kenneth had come upon a cross-country ski trail. Lopashanski was able to use a mapping program to locate Kyle and Kenneth, and he directed them by phone. Some twenty minutes later the pair emerged from the woods at the Rocky Branch trailhead at Route 16. Though tired and hungry, the two men were uninjured. Herz and Dupuis made it back to the Rocky Branch trailhead at 9:35 P.M.

Comment: Kyle and Kenneth's plan to hike out to and back from Mount Isolation amid these spring conditions was overly ambitious. Caught by snow and amid blowdowns, the pair did well. Advised by Lt. Ober to wait for daylight, Kyle and Kenneth burrowed into the snow with a space blanket and added layers of clothing and did just that. Encountering further problems following the trail on the 12th, they used a map and compass well, matching it to the terrain they could see and figuring out a bearing that aimed at the nearest road. Even with sketchy phone coverage, they also managed to keep those waiting for them apprised of what and how they were doing.

NHFG faced a possibly demanding rescue effort at the same time they had most of their resources—staff and volunteers—at work on Mount Moosilauke looking for Arun A., whose plight seemed dire. The work done via phone and radio carried the day, and two deeply capable volunteers provided the assurance that, should Kyle and Kenneth be unable to extricate themselves, help was near, albeit it moving slowly over very difficult conditions.

Unlike the four prior May Days, this one brought no recommendation that the hikers be charged for the rescue effort. Instead it carried the satisfaction of self-sufficiency and a nicely calibrated response.

Spring snow figured prominently in all of these incidents. Its monorails make going slippery and slow. When trails vanish beneath it, a problem opposite to the monorail can arise: Late-season snow off trail is often soft and unstable; when walkers punch through its mealy, often undermined surface, the snow sometimes shucks off a boot or shoe that's in deep. Why don't these lost hikers retrieve their boots? For those in mid-wallow, digging out a boot from two or three feet of snow may seem too much.

June's Cold

June 13 didn't offer much to recommend the summit of Mount Washington: The observatory archives coded its weather as 126, which is shorthand for fog, fog reducing visibility, and glaze or rime ice. The temperature peaked at 45 F, bottomed out at 28, and 0.28 inches of rain fell, hurried on by winds averaging 40 MPH, with a top gust of 70.

A family of three climbed into that day, and by its end, despite heroic efforts by NHFG COs and Mount Washington Park staff, they were one fewer. Sandra L., age 63, her husband Paul, and daughter Amanda were near the summit, when, at around 2:30 P.M., Sandra said she could not go on. Amanda called for help, and at 2:35 P.M. NHFG Sgt. Glen Lucas reached

Amanda by phone and heard her frantic plea. Knowing that the trio was only 0.2 mile from the top, Lucas encouraged them to keep moving up, and, if that was impossible, to keep moving in place. Lucas then called Mount Washington State Park to get someone to go to the family's immediate assistance; while he was calling, Lucas got another call from Amanda, who said that her mother had collapsed and was wavering in and out consciousness. Lucas said that help was on the way down from the summit, and he and CO Ben Lewis scrambled into their truck and headed for the base of the Mount Washington Auto Road.

While the COs drove up, state park personnel responded. At a little after 3 P.M. park manager Patrick Hummel set off from the summit down the Tuckerman Ravine Trail with supplies for dealing with hypothermia. He found the family at 3:20 P.M. spread out along the trail; at the back was Sandra who was "sitting awkwardly" just off the trail. Hummel described the scene in a post-incident report: "She was repeating, 'I cannot move my legs,' and I asked if she had fallen. She replied again about not being able to move her legs. She was wearing light layers, glove liners, and no hat."

Hummel summoned Amanda, and as he unpacked some dry gear to try to warm Sandra, he gave Amanda supplies for her father as well. Sandra kept repeating that she couldn't move her legs, and as Hummel tried to put a hat and dry parka on her, she resisted. He noted in his report, "Sandra's lack of cooperation and resistance did not appear to be something she was actively aware of doing." Hummel called for added help, and soon park employee Kevin St. Gelais arrived.

St. Gelais persuaded Paul and Amanda to go on to the top, and he tried to help Hummel get dry clothes on Sandra, who continued to resist. The two then tried to get Sandra up and walking, but she "stood upright stiffly, and would not voluntarily move her legs." They then tried to carry Sandra between them, but could manage only a few feet of progress. Hummel then tried carrying Sandra on his back, but her resistance made that impossible. At 3:50 P.M. Hummel sent St. Gelais back to the summit for a litter.

A few minutes later, NHFG COs Lucas and Lewis arrived, and the three men managed to get Sandra onto Lucas's back. Lewis then led, while Hummel boosted and stabilized from behind. At 4:10 P.M., they reached a warmed state park truck and got Sandra into it for the ride down the Auto Road to the valley. As St. Gelais drove, CO Lewis kept track of Sandra, checking her pulse, maintaining head-tilt for an open airway. Her pulse was slow, her breathing shallow. At the base of the Auto Road, Gorham EMS met them, and, after

checking Sandra's pulse, began cardiopulmonary resuscitation. A short while later, Sandra was pronounced dead at Androscoggin Valley Hospital.

Comment: Both the mistakes and the sad cost of those mistakes are evident. Whatever the season, Mount Washington can and will deliver weather not to be trifled with. Of note in the facts detailed by NHFG and Mount Washington State Park employees is how cold works variously on people. All three climbers were underdressed and under-equipped, and all three suffered degrees of debilitation from the cold they encountered. Two were able—with assistance—to get through it to the summit; one was not. Sandra's agitated resistance to help when it came is consistent with the range of responses found in hypothermia literature. In extreme moments, the deeply cold can respond irrationally. For those of us working into and with cold, it's good to know that its effects may vary widely.

Later That Day

June 13 was waning, but it wasn't done with the NHFG COs from the prior incident. This call came in at 7:48 P.M., and soon Sgt. Glen Lucas and CO Ben Lewis were back in the truck, headed back also to Mount Washington. Kevin M., age 19, and Aiden M., 14, had called 911 to say that their 80-year-old grandfather James C. had not returned from their hike up Mount Washington via the Tuckerman Ravine Trail and Lion Head Trail. Light was fading at the end of this long June day, and they knew that James was not carrying a light, phone, or overnight gear. The weather, as noted in the prior incident, was foggy.

From the summit, Lucas sent two COs down the Tuckerman Ravine Trail to the Lion Head Trail and asked the Appalachian Mountain Club to send a staffer from its Hermit Lake Shelters up the Lion Head Trail. At 9:40 P.M. AMC's employee, Sebastian Dawson, found James lying on the trail, curled up and unable to speak clearly. By 10:15 P.M. the COs had arrived also, and the three rescuers worked to rewarm James, stripping off his wet, cotton clothes, replacing them with warm layers and then getting him into a sleeping bag and bivy sack.

As the initial rescue proceeded, Lucas summoned a litter and carrying team made up of AMC personnel and NHFG COs. They drove to the Alpine Garden Trail on the Auto Road and hiked the 1.5 miles across to James, reaching him at 1:15 A.M. They took him back to the vehicles by 5 A.M. At the base of the Auto Road, an ambulance met James and took him to Androscoggin Valley Hospital, where he recovered.

Here's the scene (as reported by Sgt. Lucas) on the way down the Auto Road in the (very) early morning: Lucas was driving and James sat in the front seat next to him. Lucas asked for James's account of the day. James cast back two days for the start of his narrative. On the 11th, he and his grandsons had climbed Mount Marcy in the Adirondacks. On the 12th, they'd headed up Vermont's Mount Mansfield (where James had fallen, bruised himself, and abandoned the climb); that brought them to Washington on the 13th. Dressed primarily in cotton clothing and working with a three-day-old weather report, James headed up at around 11 A.M.

At this point, James broke his narrative and said, "I thought I was going to die." He said that his legs had stopped working and that he was so cold, he just lay down on the trail. Now he felt very lucky to have been found. "I did something foolish," he said "This mountain is nothing like the Smokies or Shenandoah Mountains. I've hiked there many times, and they are nothing like this mountain."

Comment: All of that rings true. Let's look at the decisions of all three hikers earlier in the day. Early in the climb, James and his grandsons agreed to split up, as the pair could move faster than James. James's new plan then was to reach the summit and take the Cog Railway down, arriving at the base of the Auto Road that way. That the Cog drops down the other side of the mountain was news to James (even though he was carrying a map). As he climbed, James reported the early weather to be mild and agreeable, but as he reached treeline, he said it turned rainy and cold, with sleet mixing in. Still, he pressed on, in part, he said, because descending was more painful for him. That decision wired him into the trouble that ensued.

The grandsons reached the summit, experiencing a much harder hike than anticipated. "It was way worse than expected," said Kevin. That led them to decide on another route down, and they reported taking the Nelson Crag Trail. In the aftermath, Lucas asked why they hadn't gone down the trail their grandfather was climbing to check on him, and they said the trail was too hard. Lucas, fresh off Sandra L.'s death not far from where James was found, voiced his disgust, a rare moment in NHFG official reports, but surely one merited.

Still, because we—people in general—are complicated beings, it wasn't long before another version of the story emerged in a *Boston Globe* article on June 21. The rescue had excited a lot of comment and media attention, a good deal of it taking the family to task. In this version, James defended his grandsons for adhering to the plan they had agreed upon, and he took

full responsibility for that plan. That seems fine to me. James also ascribed his physical collapse to rhabdomyolysis, “a dangerous condition in which muscles damaged by injury or severe exertion dump toxic material into the bloodstream,” the article said, “threatening kidneys and other vital organs. It was not a condition he had had before, he said.”

OK, I thought as I read and researched. The net effect would be similar to hypothermia. In either event, he had been struck down, high on the mountain, by himself in bad weather, and, even as the article made clear his unusual (for an 80-year-old) level of fitness, James had no business being where he was found.

The article proceeded to portray James as much more informed and prepared than the rescuers found him. Sgt. Lucas’s description of their conversation on the way down points to James’s being unaware of basic Mount Washington geography. In the article, James claimed to have been researching the climb for a year and wearing five layers of clothing. That’s not the scene rescuers found, and so, while I’m surely inclined to back away from intense criticism of a 19- and 14-year-old caught in a tough bind, that simply intensifies my questioning of James’s preparation and decisions.

Looping It

On June 24, Christopher S., age 70, left Lincoln Woods Trail in the wee hours for a planned Pemi Loop. The popular 31-mile circuit that includes roughly 9,000 feet of climbing draws more foot-folk of varied stripes each year. The trails that make up this loop around the Pemigewasset Wilderness get walked, run, raced, and rambled to such an extent that one suspects a Pemi Loop is an automatic entry on any mountain bucket list. The loop even has its own FKT (fastest-known time) of 5:45. June’s long daylight makes it a favored month for looping. Christopher intended a clockwise loop that would take him up the Osseo Trail, across Franconia Ridge, around to Garfield and the Twins, and finally across the Bonds and down the Bondcliff Trail, eventually back to Lincoln Woods.

Around 2 P.M. Christopher’s wife called him, and he said he was about three-quarters of the way around and that he’d be home (near Boston) by 9 P.M. When he hadn’t arrived by 11 P.M., and her calls to him went unanswered, his wife called for help. So began a rare, protracted search that grew to include 70 volunteers, 3 K-9 units, 14 NHFG COs, numbers of all-terrain vehicles, a National Guard helicopter, and numerous passersby. All this effort

ended happily on the evening of June 28, when two hikers came across Christopher near the intersection of the Bondcliff and Wilderness Trails. What happened during Christopher's nearly five days in the wilderness took some sorting out and remains vague. Time's steady markers and geography's locations can vanish when you're lost.

In post-rescue interviews both NHFG officers and Christopher sought to understand what happened to him between the June 24 2 P.M. check-in with his wife and his June 28 evening rescue. Christopher is an experienced hiker, and he knew the route he had planned. The three-fourths mark around the loop would have placed him in the vicinity of the Bonds, and he would have had cell reception at that height before descending into the uncertain coverage of the Pemigewasset Wilderness valley.

On June 25, initial searches of the loop's eastern trails between Mount Garfield and Lincoln Woods by NHFG COs and AMC hut personnel from Galehead Hut didn't find Christopher. NHFG CO Thomas Dakai was able to get confirmation of Christopher's 2 P.M. phone call with his wife from the Civil Air Patrol's cell phone forensics team members, but they could not provide Christopher's coordinates. Late that afternoon, one of the AMC searchers reported having talked with two hikers who said they'd seen a man who fit Christopher's description the day before. The encounter was on Mount Bond heading toward Bondcliff at around 6:30 P.M. They reported that the man had told them he'd injured his thumb and was out of water. NHFG COs also encountered three other hikers who said they'd seen a man who looked like Christopher that day (the 24th). They tabbed their meeting as midafternoon and near Galehead Hut.

Search plans for Wednesday the 26th expanded into drainages and trails leading away from the eastern side of the Pemi Loop but turned up no sign or new sightings of Christopher. NHFG search leaders Dakai and Lt. Jim Kneeland considered the evening sighting on the 24th near the Bonds to be the "last point seen," especially since the two hikers who reported that sighting had identified a photo of Christopher texted to Galehead Hut as surely the man they had met on trail.

And so, on the 27th, search leaders concentrated their growing number of searchers in that area's cliffs and drainages. They also had a NHANG helicopter fly searchers to locations where they could hike down into the drainages rather than having to climb them. ATVs delivered other searchers to various areas nearby. They found no sign of Christopher on the 27th. Kneeland did speak with two more hikers who also said they'd seen Christopher on the

24th. The first hiker had seen him near Galehead Hut around 3 P.M. and described him as exhausted. The other hiker had seen Christopher at the intersection of the Twinway and Bondcliff Trail in late afternoon. He'd asked for Gatorade, but she hadn't had any.

On June 28, the helicopter returned, as did more searchers, including three dogs and handlers from New England K-9 and volunteers from Upper Valley Wilderness Response Team, PVSART, and LRSAR. The plan included a line search the length of the trail from Lincoln Woods to the West Bond Trail, a distance of 10.9 miles. They found no sign of Christopher.

That evening CO Dakai spoke on the phone with the couple who had seen Christopher in the Bonds on the 24th. They confirmed the meeting and said that they'd given him some of their water for his 16-ounce bottle. He'd asked about next water sources, and they had pointed to the brook you can first hear and eventually cross below Bondcliff.

After searchers had left the area, a call from Lincoln police at 7:41 P.M. alerted Dakai to a man fitting Christopher's description having been found by hikers near the intersection of the Wilderness and Bondcliff Trails. He was described as extremely dehydrated and confused. COs responded via ATVs, and, after walking Christopher between them to the bridge at Franconia Brook (because riding on an ATV safely seemed beyond him), they transferred him to a larger vehicle from the Lincoln Fire Department, which drove him to the trailhead. From there, an ambulance took him to Spears Memorial Hospital in Plymouth where he began his recovery.

Comment and Aftermath: Lt. Kneeland conducted a pair of interviews with Christopher, one on June 29, the other on August 11. By the second interview, he'd regained some of the estimated 25 pounds he'd lost, and the considerable media attention had died down. Still, the events of Christopher's days "away" confused both men. Late on June 24, coming down from Bondcliff, Christopher thought he had arrived at Black Brook. From there to the trail's meeting with the Wilderness Trail, the brook's never far away. Over the days he was lost, Christopher remembered spending a good deal of time sheltering beneath a rock overhang, and he recalled hallucinating, at one point having an extended conversation with a rock. At another point, he heard voices and thought he saw someone across the brook, but when he waded over, he found no one. He speculated that he must have spent his time on the east side of the brook, because he crossed over it when he made his final push to get out on the 28th and was found by the hikers. His pack also disappeared during these days, and it is still out there.

What's clear from the interviews is that the linear sequencing on which we depend to track time and its days vanished for Christopher. So, not only was he off trail and lost, but he was out of time-touch as well. On the day he was found, motivated by knowing he needed to get out or he would die, and, he said in a later interview, by wanting to see his family, he worked to refind a way. That led him finally to his meeting with the Samaritan hikers.

Endurance athletes who sustain long efforts report all manner of odd perceptions, hallucinations, and imaginary conversations during their trials. At some point—one that varies among us, and one that shifts also with age—the depletions of extreme work tip us out of our predictable, navigable world and into being “away.” My own modest experience with this came at the end of a six-hour cross-country ski marathon, when my peripheral vision became crowded with “beings.” When I turned to look, they vanished. But “they” were “there,” I was sure. A friend had to drive me home, because I couldn't see “straight.” In the much more extreme, multiday, 300-plus kilometer Tor des Géants trail race, in Italy, hallucinations are so normal that participants compare the timing of when they start. It seems that Christopher crossed over into such a world late on the 24th, and through will and good fortune returned from it on the 28th.

The exact point of exhaustion beyond which reality shifts or vanishes is uncertain. Such variables as fitness, diet, weather, hydration, and others make each foray hard to predict. Aging, too, diminishes endurance as well. In short, it's hard to know when you'll go beyond this point and into a different world. Christopher's age, 70, made him more susceptible.

The aftermath of his experience unsettled Christopher, as it would, I think, anyone. “I planned this for two years,” he said in a subsequent interview. “I wanted to do the 31-mile loop. I don't know why, but I wanted to get it done. And I came close. But what does it matter when I almost did myself in?”

There is a great deal of information and insight in that brief statement. That it ends with a question mark points us back to the ongoing wonder of why we do what we do.

End Note—Billing for Rescue

A reading of this season's SAR work shows a consistent willingness by NHFG to bill for SAR brought on by negligence. I asked Col. Kevin Jordan, head of NHFG's law enforcement division, about my perception, and he agreed with it. He said that, while it's impossible to tell how much the threat of billing

deters hikers from negligent behaviors, he and his COs do believe it prevents some of those risks and behaviors. So, NHFG sees such billing as a tool to address risky behavior patterns, not as a way to balance the SAR budget. Jordan also points out an important statistic that shows sparing use of this option: While NHFG has averaged 189 SAR missions per year over the past decade, they have billed for only an average of 11 of those SAR missions per year. For me, this policy makes good sense.

Postscript: Appreciation

Late fall brought the unwelcome news of Gene Daniell's death. As longtime readers of this column will remember, Gene was its editor from the late 1980s into the early 2000s, and so, when I became the journal's editor-in-chief in 1989, I inherited him. As happens often when we are new at a job, resources (articles, notices, wisdom) were sparse, and I worried about being able to conjure a first issue and then a second from all this absence. Amid this concern, I got a thick envelope whose return address said simply, Daniell, NH.

Inside that envelope, I found pages of accident narratives and analyses, so many in fact that I considered briefly making the issue an accident-themed one. I sat down to read. After this first read-through, I knew two things: I had copy, lots of it, and this guy Daniell sure knew the ground his reports covered and the surprises that ground could deliver.

Those of you who know Gene's legend, his work with AMC's *White Mountain Guide* and his being the first to complete what's now known as the Grid—climbing all of New Hampshire's 4,000-footers in each month—aren't surprised by this depth of mountain nous. And those who met and hiked with Gene won't be surprised by this either: Gene liked to talk, in person and on paper. Story followed story, and each one had also siblings and spawn; Gene's stories sometimes digressed like a braiding stream. So many channels, so much information. And—no surprise here either—Gene held opinions, strong ones.

For an editor, this sometimes posed a challenge. Gene sent me columns full of richly detailed stories, as were his precise analyses of those incidents. But this detailing also made him reluctant to let go of his column when deadlines neared; there was always more to say. So the gift of so much good copy was not unalloyed. If I'd allotted 12 pages for the column, I'd sometimes receive 23, with only slim hours left before I had to turn in the edited version. Editor's sigh. And I had to be aware of Gene's tendency to layer on judgment. I wanted his column to reflect the kindness I knew in the man.

So, I had some work to do, often late at night. But the results were invariably good and useful, and very closely followed. Gene's readers were many, his critics few.

I learned the subtleties of parsing people's troubles in the backcountry from my work with Gene. In particular, I learned to focus on water in its various states and seasons as a force to be wary of. I knew this from my own wanderings, but Gene's emphasis on paying close attention to river and brook crossings made me a better foot-traveler. And a better writer. I think back to journal committee meetings and my work with Gene, and see a big, bright bear of a man, who sometimes had trouble sitting still because there was always another trail out there.

—*Sandy Stott*
Accidents Editor