A person wearing a green jacket, orange vest, and orange cap is falling backwards off a snowy ridge. They are wearing camouflage pants and a large backpack. The background is a clear blue sky. The person's right leg is extended downwards, and snow is visible on their pants and boots.

Anyone with a current hunting or fishing license, or boat, snowmobile, ATV registration is already covered by the Colorado Search and Rescue fund.

It can happen to the most experienced outdoorsperson.

You're two miles from the nearest road and tumble on some loose rock. The fall crumples your ankle. You can't put weight on it. You're alone. What should you do?

Scenario #2, you're wading through new snow on a high ridge with a fellow hunter. He's short of breath and feels sick to his stomach. His condition worsens. Is it a heart attack, altitude sickness or indigestion from eating last night's cold pizza?

There are any number of unexpected emergencies that can happen to hunters or anglers in remote places. The preparations you made before you left home, the items you have in your pack and your actions in response to an injury, an illness or getting lost can mean the difference between a successful rescue or not, starting with calling for help in the right place.

"In Colorado, the statutory responsibility for search and rescue lies with the county sheriff," explains Cindy Howard, Director of the Custer County Office of Emergency Management and a public information officer for the Colorado Search and Rescue (SAR) Board. "The make-up of the team that responds depends on the number of deputies under the sheriff and what SAR teams are in that area."

How SAR Works. Different counties have different resources for SAR, though they often work cooperatively with neighboring counties. Many of the teams are volunteer, nonprofit groups on-call with the local sheriff's office. In fact, a SAR team cannot initiate searches without authorization from the sheriff. In addition, the closest

Colorado Parks and Wildlife office and USDA National Forest Service office (if the rescue is in a national forest) are notified.


In Colorado, SAR teams follow the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) protocols when responding to backcountry emergencies. Most team members are trained in CPR, Wilderness First Aid, evacuation with a litter and landing a flight-to-life helicopter, but otherwise, skills vary widely from team to team across the state.

Some bigger SAR teams, such as the Al-



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IN THE MOUNTAINS



Article & Photos
By
**LISA DENSMORE
BALLARD**

LOST! 4 STEPS TO REORIENT YOURSELF

Getting lost usually starts with simple disorientation. You don't recognize your surroundings and start wandering, then you become lost. Use these four steps to reorient yourself:

- **Stop.** Movement is not helpful until you know which way to go, and you can't effectively do the other three steps.
- **Breathe.** Breathing helps control anxiety which can lead to panic. If you don't know where you are, you need to be calm and thoughtful to figure out your next move.
- **Look for landmarks.** A landmark might be big like a mountain, but it can also be closer and more modest, like an unusual plant, a hollow log or a boulder. The denser the undergrowth, the more observant you need to be.
- **Listen.** Most people who get lost are within 300 yards of a trail, road or their camp, close enough to hear the voices of other people.



pine Rescue Team based in Evergreen, have specialized skills. Members of Alpine are trained to handle emergencies that require mountaineering, avalanche and technical climbing abilities. It is one of 11 accredited mountain-rescue teams in Colorado that can respond to crises in remote alpine areas.

Lesser populated counties often share SAR resources. For example, Custer County with only 4,600 residents spread across 740 square miles might call upon Fremont County, its neighbor directly to the north, to help with a search.

"The state and federal prisons give Fremont's SAR teams access to tracking dogs," says Howard, "Hunters are a pretty stout group in the outdoors, but they sometimes get lost or are susceptible to unexpected heavy snow, whereas anglers are typically at risk during lightning season. My team in Custer County has the local knowledge, but we get aid from surrounding teams and the Colorado Search and Rescue Board if it's a complex rescue, or if we need additional resources."

During hunting season, Howard places the most common backcountry emergencies into four categories: trauma; medical conditions; cold weather emergencies; and

acute mountain sickness (AMS):

Trauma. Trauma includes fractures, dislocations, burns, head injuries and open wounds. "With hunters, trauma is usually due to an equestrian-related incident, like getting thrown from a horse, or an ATV accident," says Howard, "It could also be a gunshot wound due to the accidental discharge of a firearm, but that's much rarer. I've also treated a few cases where a hunter spilled boiling water from his camp stove onto his feet while his socks were off."

According to Howard, for these types of serious injuries, others present can take important steps before help arrives, using the NOLS' A-B-C-D-E system for guidance:

Airway: Open it if it's blocked.

Breathing: If the victim isn't breathing, administer mouth-to-mouth resuscitation.

Circulation: Stem the flow of blood with pressure to the wound and elevation.

Disability and decision: Assess the victim from head to toe, then decide what to do. If you need to move the victim, do it wisely, i.e., don't make a person with potentially fractured vertebrae walk to the nearest trailhead.

Exposure: Protect the victim from the elements and keep them warm.

Medical Conditions. Rapid-onset medical emergencies include heart attack, stroke or an allergic reaction. Pre-existing medical conditions that can rear up in the backcountry include heart conditions, asthma and diabetes. In any of these situations, call for help as soon as possible.

"A 5-mile hike out is not the best thing in a medical emergency," warns Howard. "Call 911 immediately! If it's an allergy and you've got Benadryl, take it. If you've got an Epi-pen, use it. If it's a heart attack and you know CPR, do it. Help will come, but it might take three to four hours if a helicopter is not available."

Cold Weather Emergency. The two most common cold-weather emergencies among late-season hunters are frostbite and hypothermia. In both cases, creating heat is critical.

Frostbite is like freezer-burning a part of your body, usually the face, fingers or toes. Severe frostbite can result in loss of body parts. Like burns, the severity of frostbite is categorized as first degree (skin turns white and is cold and firm to touch); second degree (the skin blisters); and third degree (the skin blackens). The earlier you treat frostbite, the better the outcome. Gently

warm the skin with a heat source, such as a campfire, disposable handwarmers or next to another person's body. The groin and armpits are guaranteed hot spots. Do not rub the frostbitten area.

Hypothermia can be life-threatening, as the body's core temperature has dropped too low to conduct normal metabolic functions. Like frostbite, hypothermia is categorized in three degrees. In stage 1, the body temperature falls 2-3 degrees below normal. Symptoms usually include shivering, loss of dexterity, nausea and fatigue. In stage 2, the body temperature drops 4 to 7 degrees below normal. The victim may still shiver violently but says he feels warm. The skin turns pale and the lips and extremities turn blue. He or she acts uncoordinated and confused. In stage 3, the body temperature drops 7 or more degrees below normal. Metabolic functions are severely impaired. Death is near unless the victim receives immediate professional treatment.

As hypothermia worsens, the victim may lose the ability to warm himself without a heat source, such as a campfire or another person. Replace any wet articles of clothing with dry ones. Wrap the victim in blankets or a sleeping bag, and don't hesitate to get in there with him if he isn't warming up.

Acute Mountain Sickness. The only way to quickly treat AMS is to go to a lower elevation. The problem with AMS is the symptoms are often mistaken for another condition.

"I once helped rescue a woman who had been on chemotherapy. Her red blood cells were low. She thought she was having a heart attack but it was really AMS," recalls Howard. "The biggest mistake people make, especially out-of-state folks and people from the Front Range, is ignoring the early symptoms of AMS, such as a headache and nausea, because they're fixated on a goal."

When to call for help. If an injury or medical condition is acute, calling for help is a no-brainer, but then there's that gray area, especially among those who take pride in being self-sufficient or who worry about the cost of a professional rescue.

"If you're going to get worse, call for help, the sooner, the better," advises Howard, "We don't want people to be afraid to call because of the bill. You might have to pay for an airlift or an ambulance, but SAR teams do not charge in Colorado."

Likewise, don't call if it's not a real emergency. If you're tired, hungry, and it's getting dark, it's not an emergency. If you shoot an

elk at sundown then take until midnight to field-dress it, and your family calls in because you're late, a SAR team will mobilize, but don't ask them to help pack out the meat. Likewise, Howard warns if it's 8:00 p.m., and you're stuck on the side of a mountain with visions of a helicopter carrying you to safety in a half-hour, it's probably not going to happen.

"We're moms and dads with full-time jobs who want to help you, but it takes time," she says, "SAR teams use a search urgency chart to rank situations as an immediate go, take a measured response, or evaluate and investigate. If it's nighttime and it's an experienced hunter whose condition is stable, who has knowledge of the terrain and the weather is good, we might wait until morning. However, if it's a teenager who got separated from dad, is not familiar with the woods, is panicky and the weather is deteriorating, we'll pull the trigger quickly."

During Howard's 11 years as a SAR volunteer, she finds the two biggest mistakes hunters make that lead to an emergency call are not being physically prepared, not only for the hunt but also to carry the meat out, and getting surprised by the weather. "I can't tell you how many times there's been a 2-foot dump of snow on a hunting camp," she says. "The guys get rescued but their pick-up is there all winter." 🐾

Regular contributor, Lisa Densmore Ballard, is an award-winning freelance writer and photographer. She frequently hikes deep into the backcountry to hunt and fish. Before moving to the Rocky Mountains, she spent a decade on the New Hampshire Outdoor Council, the state's SAR advisory board. www.LisaBallardOutdoors.com.

CONTENTS OF A COMPACT FIRST AID KIT

Carrying a first aid kit is common sense. Here's a list of items to include that won't take up much space or weigh you down:

- Ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil) or Naproxen (Aleve)
- Moleskin
- Antibiotic ointment
- Band-aids of various sizes
- Gauze squares
- Tweezers
- Toenail clippers or blunt-end scissors
- Antihistamine
- Disposable latex (or similar) gloves
- Small roll of athletic tape
- Safety pins

- 2nd Skin (gel bandage)
- Tincture of Benzoin

BEFORE YOU LEAVE HOME...

Tell someone who is not going with you:

- The county and the area where you are hunting
- The county sheriff's phone number
- The make, model, color and license plate number of the vehicle you're driving, and where you park
- The location of your camp and what it looks like from the ground and the air
- A description of your outerwear and your boot size

HOW TO HELP SEARCHERS RESCUE YOU

If you or your pal are injured, sick or lost in the backcountry, here's what to do to help rescuers find you more efficiently:

- Blow a whistle. You can "shout" for help with a whistle much longer than with your voice. Make sustained blasts, otherwise you'll sound like a chirping bird.
- Signal with bright cloth or a reflective object. Wave your blaze orange vest or spread out a solar blanket in a clearing to help rescuers see you from a nearby highpoint or from the air.
- Call 911. If someone is seriously injured or sick, especially if their condition is getting worse, call 911 or the county sheriff immediately.
- Call home. Calmly describe the situation and where you are. If you're lost, give the last location you remember, how long ago you were there and your current surroundings. Set a time for a follow-up call so you can turn off your cell phone to preserve precious battery life.
- Send a text message. If you can't get a call through, try a text message. Keep it simple. For example, if you're lost, key in something like: I am lost and need help. I was last on (trail name and location on trail) at (time of day). Add the direction you headed off the trail if you know it and any major landmarks you can see.
- Drop a pin. If your smartphone has a map app on it and can pin your location, text it to the rescue team.
- Take care of yourself. Stay hydrated, eat snacks and stay warm.
- Keep a positive attitude. Use "survive" as your mantra. You might be uncomfortable, but be determined to make it. It can take time for the rescue team to get there.