

**2020**  
**Mount Shasta Wilderness**  
**Search & Rescue - Incident Narratives**

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**03.02.2020 – Avalanche Gulch- Solo climber, frostbitten fingers – Male/50**

On Monday 03.02.2020, a 50-year-old male climber contacted the USFS climbing rangers looking for assistance in recovering his tent and belongings he left behind at Lake Helen. He was attempting a solo, two-day winter climb of the Avalanche Gulch route on Saturday 02.29.2020. He had planned to camp at Lake Helen, but when cold temperature and strong wind made for a challenging experience setting up his tent, he turned back, abandoning the majority of his climbing gear. He reported having severe frostbite on his fingers when he returned home. Ranger Sorenson recovered the climber's tent the next day finding it tangled in the rocks a few hundred feet below Lake Helen. There was no sign of the cooking stove or other belongings reported to have been inside the tent. Setting up a tent in the wind and cold is an often-underestimated skill required in winter mountaineering. Fortunately, frostbitten fingers were the only injuries that occurred. A winter climb of Mount Shasta significantly raises the stakes and requires proper preparation, research, and experience.

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**03.08.2020 – Avalanche Gulch – Lost solo climber – Male/30**

A 30-year-old male climber attempted a two-day solo climb of Mount Shasta. On his first day, 03.07.2020, the solo climber ascended to approximately 11,000 on the Avalanche Gulch route. Met by low visibility and strong winds, the solo climber decided to turn back. The climber called his wife and told her he was near Horse Camp and that he planned to return that night. Shortly after the call his phone battery died. Worried when her husband had not yet returned, the climber's wife called 911 reporting that he did not have gear to spend the night (untrue). Siskiyou County Sheriff Deputy Bob Buker contacted the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) Mt. Shasta Climbing Rangers to report the missing climber. Backcountry skiers camping at the Bunny Flat trailhead stated to Deputy Buker that they had seen a solo climber snowshoeing around the base of Green Butte near Old Ski Bowl at approximately 1630 hours. One skier reported contacting the climber who asked, "Is this Green Butte?". The skier responded, "Yes". The solo climber then continued to traverse south towards Old Ski Bowl. Unaware that a search was ensuing, the solo climber set up his tent near Panther Meadow. He had a stove, food, and sleeping bag with him and made camp. The following morning, 03.08.2020, the solo climber walked into the Bunny Flatt trailhead at 0820. Rangers and Siskiyou County SAR members were staged at Bunny Flat preparing for the SAR. He was uninjured and in good health.

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### **5.5.2020 – Avalanche Gulch – Lost Snowboarder – Male/22**

Three snowboarders attempted a two day climb of the Avalanche Gulch route. One of the riders reported that he had previous experience on Mount Shasta. The group left Bunny Flat trailhead at approximately 1300 on Sunday 5.3.2020 and made camp at Lake Helen at 2300 hours. This was during the Covid-19 10,000-foot closure order. (The mountain was closed above 10,000 feet.) The next day, Tuesday 5.5.2020, they attempted a summit climb leaving camp at 0900. Thwarted, they decided to return to Lake Helen at approximately 1600. After packing up camp they descended from Lake Helen at 1830 hours. One rider fell and dislocated his shoulder upon attempting to get back up. After an initial assessment, the three decided they could continue descending towards Bunny Flat. When the group got below treeline, the injured rider fell behind and became disorientated in the trees. The other two continued to Bunny Flat and realized their partner was no longer with them. After waiting a half hour, the two climbed back up in search of the lost rider. Unable to locate him, they called 911 at approximately 2030 hours. At 0130 Siskiyou County Sheriff's Dept. SAR Coordinator, Mike Burns contacted climbing ranger Ryan Sorenson to report the missing climber. Siskiyou County requested CHP helicopter to aid in the search as Burns and Sorenson began searching the roads below Bunny Flat. Unable to locate the lost rider, the decision to resume the search during daylight hours was made. The search was resumed at 0730. Ranger Sorenson, a team of two county SAR members and the two snowboarders searched from Bunny Flat. Another team of SAR members searched from Upper Sand Flat road. At 0800, SAR members located the lost rider near the old rain gauge below the Horse Camp cabin. He suffered from minor fatigue due to lack of sleep and exposure to the cold but reported that he was in good health and that his shoulder had relocated on its own. He was able to hike out to Bunny Flat with climbing ranger Sorenson and the SAR team.

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### **06.14.2020 – Avalanche Gulch – Shoulder injury – Glissading – 65/F**

On 06/14/2021 at approximately 1451 hours, Siskiyou County Sheriff's Office received a 911 call regarding an injured climber on Mt. Shasta. The caller stated her friend had fallen and injured her shoulder, stating their location as approximately 400 feet above Helen Lake.

USFS ranger Coots and ranger Delmar were notified by ranger Meyers and they responded. Coots and Delmar hiked up from their location below Lake Helen to approximately 11,000 feet, climber's right of the Upper Moraine. Ranger Delmar made first patient contact. The climber was with her climbing partner and permitted outfitter guide. Delmar shoveled a ledge to secure the patient and placed a sleeping pad down so the patient could rest, insulated from the snow. Delmar assessed the patient. She was alert with a chief complaint of severe (9/10) right shoulder pain due to a self-arrest attempt while glissading. Ranger Coots arrived. Because walking was too painful for the patient, the decision was made for helicopter rescue. Siskiyou County Sheriff requested CHP helicopter. The patient was assisted to Lake Helen for a

helicopter rescue. At 1645 hours, CHP H-14 safely rescued the climber and transported her to an awaiting ambulance that brought her to Mercy Mt Shasta.

The climber said she began down climbing the mountain after they had successfully summited. While glissading, she began going too fast. The climber attempted to self-arrest using her ice axe, however the ice axe grabbed into the snow, which caused her to injure her shoulder. She said she attempted to hike down, but the pain was unbearable, and she called for help.

We are unsure if she was using a proper glissade and/or self-arrest technique.

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#### **06.21.2020 – West Face – Slip/Fall - Broken Ribs – 55/M**

At 1745 on Sunday, June 21st, ranger Coots, Sorenson and Delmar were wrapping up the workday at the ranger station in Mt Shasta when ranger Coots received a call from SAR coordinator Mike Burns of an injured climber on Mt Shasta. The injured party was located at 11,000 feet on the West Face route. Chief complaint was a possible broken rib and punctured right lung.

At 1910, Ranger Coots arrived on scene via CHP H14 transport. A head-to-toe assessment revealed possible broken ribs and breathing complications, right side of the chest. The reporting party stated that the climber had fallen while down climbing a 50-degree slope, losing control and colliding with a rock garden at the bottom of the slope, resulting in injuries to his right side.

With good fly conditions, a plan was made to raise the climber off the mountain via CHP helicopter hoist. The climber was safely extracted off the mountain and flown to Mercy Mt Shasta. The rescue was finished at 2010 hours.

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#### **6.28.20 – West Face – Slip/Fall – Head injury, loss of consciousness, broken bones– 55/M**

At approximately 1240, a male/55-year-old climber slipped and fell while descending the West Face. He fell in a short and steep section of the route where it traverses through a gap to return to lower angle terrain. The climber had crampons on and an ice axe in his hand when he slipped and slid 400 feet, colliding with an exposed rock patch at the bottom of the snow slope, elevation 10,400 feet. His partner stated that he was found against a large rock, speaking in German (he usually speaks English) and alert and oriented only to his name. His partner immediately dialed 911 and the Siskiyou County Sheriff and USFS Climbing Rangers were notified. Lead USFS ranger Meyers received the initial call and made notifications to the three other rangers stationed on the Mountain. Ranger Sorenson was packing up camp at Lake Helen, ranger Delmar was near Horse ramp returning from Hidden Valley and ranger Coots was at the Bunny Flat trailhead. CHP helicopter H14 started searching the mountain for the patient as Coots and Delmar began hiking the trail back to Hidden Valley. Sorenson traversed from Helen across Casaval Ridge. CHP helicopter H14 returned to Mercy Mount Shasta, picking up Ranger Meyers for a possible transport/drop off in Hidden Valley. There was some uncertainty of landing due to high wind.

At 1410, Ranger Sorenson arrived on first on scene. A head-to-toe assessment revealed facial trauma, black and blue eyes and pain in the right shoulder and upper thoracic spine. The patient was wearing a helmet. Two nearby climbers hiked up to help and one was instructed to hold C-spine. Ranger Delmar arrived shortly after and assisted with taking vitals and a log roll to provide padding and further assessment of the spine. H14 landed with Ranger Meyers at the upper Hidden Valley camp 9,900 feet. It was determined unsafe to carry the patient without a proper litter, so Rangers Meyers (successfully dropped off in Hidden Valley by H-14) and Coots hiked in a SKED to the incident location from the helicopter landing zone lower in Hidden Valley. At 1530, the patient was packaged in the SKED litter with an improvised c-collar. The remaining climbing party, four rangers and the two other climbers descended, carrying the patient across rock and snow to the Hidden Valley camp. At 1620, the climber was safely loaded in H14 and transported to Mercy Hospital Mount Shasta. The climber suffered extensive injuries, some requiring surgery, but is expected to make a full recovery.

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#### **7.5.2020 – Whitney Glacier – Lost Climber – 47/M**

On July 5<sup>th</sup> at 1642 hours, USFS rangers received word from Siskiyou County SAR coordinator Bob Buker that a climber had gone off route on Misery Hill and had descended onto the Whitney Glacier. The climber was near 13,000 feet. The 47-year-old male climber was equipped with crampons, a single trekking pole. He reached the summit and began to descend at 1345 hours with a depleted supply of water and food. He had climbed the Avalanche Gulch route. The climber, now marooned on an island of rocks in the middle of the glacier, told rescuers that, “moving off the rock pile may cost him his life.” Rangers and Siskiyou County SAR decided for a helicopter evacuation. CHP H-14 hauled rangers Coots and Delmar to the Mt Shasta/Shastina col. While waiting for rescue, the climber decided to try and descend on his own, haphazardly glissading a slope. His glissade path took him over a crevasse and landed on a snow bridge in another crevasse. During his fall, the climber injured his neck and nose but was otherwise okay. He climbed out of the crevasse and began to descend the glacier again, this time avoiding crevasses and stopping near 11,000 feet. The helicopter and rescuers redirected after locating the climber’s *new* position. Rangers Coots and Delmar arrived on scene at 2000 hours. After initial assessment, the climber and two rangers made their way to the helicopter landing zone at 10,400 feet. At 2040, the climber was safely loaded onto H14 and rangers descended on foot into the night, reaching the trailhead at 0030 hours.

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#### **8.14.20 – Green Butte – Slip/Fall – M/24**

A 24-year-old male was out for a day hike from the Old Ski Bowl trailhead, headed up Green Butte. There is no trail to the top, only loose scrambling. The hiker slipped and fell and broke his ankle and suffered facial lacerations. He was hoisted off with a CHP helicopter. The incident was handled by Siskiyou County and CAL FIRE. USFS ranger Meyers responded but was not utilized.

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### **09.21.2020 – South Side – Lost Climbers – M/22 (x2)**

Two young climbers climbed the mountain via Avalanche Gulch on September 20<sup>th</sup>. They had parked near the 31 road by the Mt Shasta Ski Park as the gate on the Everitt Memorial Highway was closed. Upon descending in the dark, they could not find their car. The boys spent a long night out but were able to locate their vehicle around 0630 the next morning. Rescuers and family were immediately notified.

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### **9.26 – 9.27.2020 – Hotlum/Bolam Ridge– Fatality – Slip/Fall – 36/M**

On Friday, September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020, Jeffrey Sutton and Chelsey Klein arrived at the Mount Shasta, Northgate trailhead and began hiking at approximately 1600 hours. They set up camp two miles up the trail as the sun began to set. The next morning, they attempted to climb the Hotlum Bolam Ridge route leaving camp at approximately 1000 hours. At 1600 hours they made the decision to descend from their high point near 13,000 feet. They descended to approximately 12,000 feet and realized they were slightly off course from where they ascended. To return to the lateral moraine from where they came, they put on their crampons, got out their ice axes and attempted to traverse across the western reaches of the Hotlum Glacier, back to the rock and dirt. As they traversed, Jeffrey slipped and fell, tumbling a few hundred feet down the very icy slope. Conditions were as such that self-arrest was impossible. Chelsey called 911. According to the reporting party (Chelsey), Jeffrey was unconscious. After a few minutes Jeffrey began to move and attempted to stand up but slipped a second time falling out of view from Chelsey. Sheriff Deputy and Siskiyou County SAR Coordinator Mike Burns notified Lead Climbing Ranger Nick Meyers of the 911 call and requested assistance from the California -National Guard. Spartan 409 crew stationed in Redding, CA on a fire complex diverted to assist. At approximately 2330 hours, Chelsey was hoisted and transported to Mercy Mount Shasta by the National Guard crew. After refueling, the Spartan 409 crew returned to search for Jeffrey. Unable to locate him, two USFS climbing rangers were inserted to 8,600 feet. At 0230, Siskiyou County SAR ground crew and ranger Meyers began hiking from Northgate trailhead. At sunrise Rangers Meyers, Sorenson and Moore began to search the glacier. At 0720 Jeffrey was located deceased and CHP H-14 helicopter safely conducted the recovery hoist with USFS rangers Meyers, Moore and Sorenson on the ground.

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### **10.05 – 10.06.2020 – Avalanche Gulch – Solo – Off Route – Slip/Fall – Open bivy – M/23**

On the afternoon of October 5<sup>th</sup>, 2020, twenty-three-year-old climber slipped and fell from 12,500 feet in the middle of the Trinity Chutes, Avalanche Gulch. At this time of the year, the south side of the mountain was completely devoid of snow. The Trinity Chutes is one of the most active portions of the mountain with regards to geologic process...rockfall.

The climber called 911 and reported a chief complaint of two broken ankles with other injuries. Siskiyou Sheriff Burns notified USFS ranger Meyers at 5:23pm and requested CHP air operations shortly after. FS Rangers Meyers, Coats and Sorenson quickly gathered equipment and met Burns and CHP at Mercy Mt. Shasta helipad.

CHP H-14, with little time left in the day, made one troop haul (Meyers and Coots) to Helen Lake. The plan was to ascend from Helen Lake to the climbers and lower him to a safer location for the night, preparing for a hoist the following morning.

Meyers and Coots arrived on scene at 8:52pm, 12,400 feet. Meyers conducted head to toe examination. Findings included AxOx4, multiple lacerations head to toe (no helmet), severe open thumb injury, possible broken ribs and broken ankle (left), possible dislocated right ankle. First aid was administered. Meyers and Coots then moved the climber to a safer location behind a moderate sized boulder 20 feet down the slope. Rockfall was active. This was the only reasonable cover in the immediate area. Darkness had fallen by this time. With only two attendants, no anchor points, active rockfall and darkness, Meyers and Coots determined it unsafe to haul the climber down the slope any further via the SKED litter. The patient was secured behind a rock, covered in emergency blankets and warm garments. Meyers positioned himself near the patient behind a different rock and Coots was about 30 feet away behind yet another rock for cover. These were ridiculously small spaces and the only cover from rockfall above.

Meyers and Coots agreed they would re-assess the situation once moonlight was shed on the slope a few hours into the night, perhaps making the descent more reasonable. When the moon lit the slope, Meyers and Coots discussed the situation. Again, it was decided it was too risky to abandon cover from behind the boulders. The slope was approximately 35-40 degrees. Large windowpanes of loose rock would easily slide down slope with every step. Rangers decided to hold out overnight for the chance of a helicopter hoist in the morning. There was pressure to get the patient to a lower elevation as the CHP helicopter was not confident they could hoist from the 12,400 foot elevation. A United States Guard chinook was on order, though with only a 100-foot hoist cable, it was thought the rotor wash would trigger too much rockfall on scene. Still, Meyers and Coots believed the risk of helicopter hoist and rockfall was safer than trying to lower the patient down the extremely long, loose, rock strewn slope, no matter how many ground personnel to help. In the meantime, a team of 6 SAR personnel were in route as backup for a plan B ground haul operation, but more rescuers in the dangerous chutes area was added extra risk.

In the early morning hours, CHP H-14 arrived on scene and after stripping the helicopter and burning off fuel, was able to conduct the hoist operation near max power. All rescue personnel made it off the mountain safely.

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### **11.08.20 – Clear Creek – Lost Climbers – 18/M (x3)**

A group of three 18-year-old males started hiking from the Clear Creek trailhead at 0730. They reached the summit at 1330 as weather began to set in. At 1630, descending the route in fresh snow and low visibility, the climbing party got disoriented when they decided to take a “shortcut” back to the trailhead. The climbers stated they followed a creek down slope until it met a 15- foot cliff/waterfall. (Clear Creek flows into Mud Creek, neither of the drainages the proper descent route) Determined to follow the creek and “shortcut”, one of the climbers

separated from his group and climbed down the cliff despite concerns from his partners. Realizing that they were lost and now missing a partner, the two remaining climbers called 911. After a short conversation with the 911 operator, the cell phone died. At 1800, Siskiyou County SAR and USFS rangers were notified. A deputy was immediately dispatched to the trailhead and found an empty vehicle and no tracks. At 2000, two SAR team members hiked from the trailhead to the approximate GPS location of the climbers, determined by the cell phone ping. Unable to locate, the SAR team returned to the trailhead and waited for daylight. The following morning, a full search was organized with SAR teams/rangers along roads/trails and a CHP H14 in the air. At 1030, rangers Sorenson and Beverly found two climbers together near the trail at 6,800 feet. At 1100, CHP H14 located the third climber near 5,000 feet near Mud Creek. He was picked up near his location and treated for minor cold related injuries. The other two were uninjured and in good health, aside from being a little cold and tired.