

# 2023

## Mount Shasta Wilderness

### SAR Incident Narratives

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#### **01.01.2023 - Avalanche Gulch, fatality - female**

On New Year's Day 2023 at 2:08pm, Siskiyou County SAR and CHP helicopter responded to a report of an elderly lethargic female on Mount Shasta near Horse Camp (Sierra Alpine Hut). USFS Ranger Nick Meyers was informed of the incident after CHP was already on scene and performing the rescue. County personnel and CHP helicopter crew members conducted the rescue. She was later pronounced dead. No other information is known about this incident and events leading up to. Cause of death is thought to be hypothermia/environmental related.

[This article from the Redding Record Searchlight](#): A woman, found walking with her small dog in the snow on Mt. Shasta, died hours after the California Highway Patrol rescued her. She succumbed to injuries caused by hypothermia, according to the CHP Search and Rescue team who flew the woman to a hospital after a tricky ridge rescue. The woman wasn't dressed properly for the freezing and blustery conditions, said Daniel Gallagher, the CHP flight officer on the rescue. Gallagher, pilot Brian Henderson and officer Jim Irwin responded to the Siskiyou County Sheriff's Office request for help just after 2 p.m. on Jan. 1. Deputies received a 911 call about the woman "huddled up in a fetal position" in the snow from a couple skiing in the back country, Gallagher said. She was wandering on the south side of the mountain near the Old Ski Bowl, located at the end of Everitt Memorial Highway, Mount Shasta Ambulance owner Angelo Banos said. Gallagher and his team flew out of Benton Airport in Redding while deputies went to Bunny Flat, a couple of miles from the Old Ski Bowl. "The couple provided a GPS pin where they were." Gallagher said, but it still took time to find them in the heavy snow. Between 2:30 and 2:45 p.m., Gallagher's team spotted the couple waving their coats at the helicopter at a point east of Horse Camp cabin. They were along the ridge between the Old Ski Bowl and Avalanche Gulch — 8,500 feet up. "The terrain was too steep for the helicopter to land, so the pilot balanced it on

one skid on the snow while officer Irwin" hiked through "knee-deep snow" to get to the woman," Gallagher said. Her eyes were open, but she wasn't moving. She appeared disoriented, he said. "Hypothermia is a serious injury. One of the first things to go is your mentation." The couple who called 911 helped move the woman 50 yards to the balancing helicopter, Gallagher said. "It's very difficult" in that altitude and snow depth "to move without skis or a sled." The woman "could barely sit up" in the helicopter, he said. "She was very underprepared for winter weather. Her clothing was definitely not appropriate: A fleece-type coat, leggings and UGG boots." The temperature in the area was 19 degrees at noon on Jan. 1, but 8 mph winds made it feel like 9 degrees, according to meteorologist Ryan Sandler at the National Weather Service in Medford. Peak winds that day reached 78 mph at 10 a.m., although first responders don't know how long the woman was exposed to the cold. One of the skiers tucked the white curly-haired dog into her coat and skied down to Bunny Flat where she turned the dog over to police, according to Gallagher and Mount Shasta Police Department spokesperson Amber Orrey. It was healthy and survived. The CHP team flew the woman to the helipad at Mercy Medical Center in Mount Shasta. Banos' team was waiting in the parking lot. "By the time we got to her, she was unresponsive," Banos said. The woman died hours later from complications due to hypothermia, according to a coroner's report, the Siskiyou County Sheriff's Office said.

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#### **4.23.2023 - Avalanche Gulch, exposure, disoriented, hypothermia - solo, male, 54,**

Summit fever. A 54-year-old, solo male climber attempted a car to car climb of Mount Shasta. He began climbing at midnight on Friday, April 21<sup>st</sup> with a small pack and no overnight equipment. Two local climbers encountered the man on the mountain on Saturday, April 22<sup>nd</sup>:

*"I saw him on the way up Misery Hill. He was moving so slowly, sometimes on his hands and knees. I talked to him briefly and asked him if he needed anything. I told him that he didn't have to go up, but he certainly needed to go down. On my way back down from the summit, he was still only 50 or 60 feet higher than where I had seen him. I told him I was a mountain guide – not exactly true – and that he should come down the mountain with me. He asked if I thought he could make it to the summit in an hour. I told him it would take him at least four hours, and he'd have to descend in the dark, which*

*would be dangerous. He absolutely refused to turn around. I ran into another climber, Rosana (Shasta local on the Siskiyou County SAR team) and she said she would try and get him to come down too.”*

The man appeared to be of the spiritual seeker genre. He had just a small pack, a helmet/ice axe/crampons, headlamp and a jet boil. It's unknown if he made it to the summit or not. None-the-less, he spent about 30 hours on the mountain with an overnight (Saturday night) without a sleeping bag, pad or tent.

On the morning of Sunday, April 23<sup>rd</sup>, Siskiyou County Sheriff's Department's Mike Johnson called USFS Ranger Nick Meyers with a report of a solo, male climber at 9,200 feet in Avalanche Gulch. The climber was cold, disoriented, mildly combative, had no shoes, socks or gloves on with equipment spread out on the slope. The first to encounter the man on Sunday morning was outfitter guide, Alpenglw Expeditions. Guide, Sam Keickhefer, who also called 911, provided the incident timeline and his efforts below.

In the end, the climber was safely hoisted by California CHP helicopter and transported to Mercy Mount Shasta. The man suffered frostbite and cardiac arrhythmia. Many thanks to Alpenglw Expeditions Sam K and the two off-duty CAL FIRE personnel that assisted in the rescue.

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### ***Incident Timeline - Report by Sam Keickhefer, Alpenglw Expeditions***

*4.23.23 - 3:00: Departed Horse Camp w/ 1 client*

*- 4:15: Connected with patient, Ben, at 9300' in Avy Gulch. Ben was barefoot, feet white and bloody, toenails missing or lifted off the bed. Ben was holding his phone and had no gloves on. Initially I asked Ben how I could help, and he said he didn't need help. He believed he was at home, and was looking for blankets because he was cold. He was insistent that he did not want us to help him and that he was fine. I would characterize Ben as severely disoriented and borderline combative. My biggest concern was Ben trying to move because it was extremely firm and he was positioned on a slope.*

*- 4:19: We took about 30 steps away from Ben and immediately called 911. After notifying 911 of the nature of the emergency, and our location, they asked we stay with Ben and they would call us back.*

*- 4:26: I received a call from someone with Siskiyou County Sheriff. This call was simply to tell me they were aware of our situation and were working on it.*

- During/after these two calls, we gathered Ben's things (boots, socks, gloves and pack) which were spread around, and approached him. He was more willing to accept help at this time. We immediately dug a flat platform for him to sit, helped him put his socks and boots on, got him in all of his layers and a few of ours. We also put him in an emergency bivy and gave him water and some food. In this process we noticed he had a jet boil, and began boiling. After warming a bit, Ben's awareness of the situation improved dramatically, and after about an hour he reported that he was feeling better, but could not feel his feet.

- 4:55: I called the Siskiyou County Sheriff number that had called me at 4:26. I gave an update, including exact coordinates. I was told that search and rescue was in progress. I requested the deputy in charge contact me.

- 6:13: Mike Johnson, Siskiyou county Sheriff contacted me. I updated him on Ben's condition, and gave him info about our needs. Mike gave me his cell to reach him at.

- 6:33: Dennis and Dennis, both of Cal Fire (not on duty) arrived at the scene and offered to help. Given their experience, their help was incredibly welcome. I called Mike back to notify him of their assistance, and share that all 3 of us had trained with CHP and were comfortable running a hoist.

- 7:30: Mike called me to notify us that H14? was in the air and roughly 30 mins out.

- 7:42: Mike called to notify us that H14 ETA was 3 minutes.

- 7:45: H14 arrived, circled, and flew off. I called Mike and he let me know that H14 wanted to try landing upslope of us. We advised against this, as the patient had no feeling in his feet, and shared that he had a brain tumor that challenged his balance. We were not comfortable moving him, given the firm surface.

- 7:47: H14 returned, and toe'd into an adjacent slope. The medic exited the ship with a screamer suit. We immediately stopped him, as he had no crampons. He handed off the screamer, and the ship returned to pick him up.

- 7:49: Ben was packaged in the screamer and the ship readied for a hoist. Ben was hoisted without issue.

**Background:** throughout the morning, we learned that Ben had departed Bunny Flat at midnight Friday (Saturday morning). He planned to climb round trip in a day and was solo. He reached the top of the Red Banks at 2pm and reported feeling quite exhausted. Because of the proximity to the summit, he decided to rest, eat and drink, and then push on. He began climbing Misery at 3pm, and we estimate he summited around 5pm. From

*there, details are unclear, but he obviously became disoriented and hypothermic as he was descending. He was out through the night with no sleeping bag or tent.*

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#### **4.28.2023 – Avalanche Gulch, fatality, slip and fall - solo, male, 36**

On the morning of Friday, April 28<sup>th</sup>, a local Mount Shasta skier was ascending up Avalanche Gulch when he came across a solo deceased climber at 8,600 feet in Avalanche Gulch proper. The climber was later identified as Chiew Saeteurn, age 36, from Sacramento, CA. Little is known about the incident. As the story goes, Chiew went up the mountain on Tuesday and made it to Horse Camp. He camped there and took a layover day on Wednesday. He moved camp to Helen Lake at some point on Thursday. Friday morning, he was found dead well below his Helen Lake camp, which was still in place and found by rangers. It's unknown if he summited or not, but he took photos of himself from The Heart and Redbanks area with crampons on. The weather was clear and warm. He was found with very little trauma, only light abrasions to his hands and torn pants on his right hip. He did not have crampons on at this point, but appeared to have an ice axe out. The terrain where he was found was not conducive for a long fall, but perhaps he fell up higher and was attempting to descend the mountain due to internal injuries? He was wearing a helmet that was not damaged. Many questions exist. Did he fall off Green Butte Ridge? This was the steepest slope near his location. Why would he be there? Why did he pass and leave his Helen Lake camp on a clear day? Was it a medical emergency? Why didn't he call 911? Chiew was found with his iPhone mounted to a chest mount harness and was still powered on. Cell service is good on the south side of Mount Shasta. It appeared that he took a fall of some distance, but when, where and was it the ultimate cause of his death is unknown. Chiew was in good shape with proper mountaineering equipment.

Siskiyou County Sheriff's Department and USFS Climbing Rangers were notified of the incident by the local skier. Forest Service climbing rangers and California Highway Patrol helicopter H-14 were requested by Siskiyou County SAR for the recovery. The body was hoisted off the mountain by climbing rangers without further incident.

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#### **05.06.2023 - Whitney Glacier, lost climber overnight - male, 51**

In near whiteout conditions on the afternoon of Friday May 5<sup>th</sup>, Adam Danielson, 52 of Milwaukee, Wisconsin separated from his party at the summit of Mount Shasta at 2:45pm and mistakenly descended the north side of the mountain onto the Whitney Glacier. The remainder of his party, who were on skis, safely descended the south side of the mountain to their previous night camp at Helen Lake. Adam never returned. The weather during the period was winter-like with rain, snow, wind and very cold temperatures. The climber had climbed into a whiteout with his party, summited late in the day, didn't have reliable navigation tools, and did not have overnight equipment. He was equipped with a small pack, water, a bit of food, ice axe, crampons, helmet,

snowshoes and cell phone with charger.

Adam realized he was lost when he encountered glaciated terrain and large crevasses of the Whitney Glacier. He called 911 and began direct communication with Siskiyou County Sheriff's Department and USFS Climbing Ranger Nick Meyers. Cellular service was good at his location, and he had an extra charger for his phone. Meyers told him that no matter what rescue effort was planned, he was looking at an open bivy on the mountain overnight. It would take rescuers 4–6 hours to get to his location by foot. Meyers suggested descending if he could identify rock, stay off the glacier and get to a lower elevation with better protection from the weather. Adam agreed, but soon came across a large crevasse and was terrified to move further. Meyers then told Adam that he'd have to shelter in place and a rescue would launch in the morning.

Rescue personnel deemed it unsafe to launch an immediate rescue operation due to darkness, extreme weather conditions and poor visibility in glaciated terrain. At 0530 the next morning, continued poor weather prevented aerial helicopter rescue. USFS Climbing Rangers launched a ground rescue effort via the Northgate Trailhead on snowmobile and skis. Siskiyou County SAR supported with a snowcat and communications. Contact was made with climber at 1230 at 11,600 feet on the Whitney Glacier. The patient was ambulatory with a minor cold injury. He was escorted out to the Northgate Trailhead by 1600. Siskiyou County Sheriff's Department transported him several miles via snowcat, from the trailhead down the road over snow and dirt to parked vehicles.

The climber was humble and appreciative of the rescue efforts. This rescue received a lot of media attention. Several take home points can be gleaned from this incident.

- Check the weather before you climb and monitor as you climb. Flexibility is one of the most important skills to have in the mountains. Be willing to change plans. Check your summit fever at the door. Don't summit late in the day.
- Carry navigation tools: map, compass, GPS, extra thumb charger, etc. Know how to use them
- Don't separate from your party. Make sure everyone is using the same mode of travel.
- Play the "what if" game...if things don't go as planned, what are you going to do? Often incidents don't involve injury, but could involve environmental hazards like an unplanned overnight. A small pad, bivy sack or tarp and an extra down jacket can make the difference.

SF Chronicle Article:

<https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:US:29a976b6-4728-495d-8b6e-34fc6a9e9c3b>

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**05.21.2023 - Avalanche Gulch, rockfall – male,45**

On the morning of Sunday, May 21, a climber was ascending Avalanche Gulch in an area locally known as “Standstill Hill” below Helen Lake. The climber sustained impact from falling rock resulting in a large bruise and small bleed on the right side of their pelvis. A Shasta Mountain Guide at 50/50 Flat witnessed the incident and responded to the scene. USFS Climbing Rangers at 12,000 feet in Avalanche Gulch overheard the incident report over an outfitter guide radio. Forest Service rangers notified Siskiyou County Sheriffs Office and descended to the incident. After rangers arrived on scene, a helicopter evacuation was advised, and the patient was transferred to Mercy Mount Shasta via California Highway Patrol helicopter by 1145.

Weather conditions were calm and clear. Total time of rescue from initial report to helicopter transport was 1.5 hours.

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### **5.27.2023 – Avalanche Gulch, glissading accident - male, 28**

A climber was glissading down Avalanche Gulch when he lost control and became tangled up with his ice axe. Injuries included a large contusion and laceration with significant bleeding to his head, above his left eye. His team members called 911. USFS Climbing Rangers were notified by Siskiyou Count Sheriffs Department. Two FS climbing rangers were near Helen Lake at the time and responded immediately. Ranger Clairmont was on scene within 30 minutes. The patient was alert but didn’t remember the incident. The bleeding had ceased. Siskiyou County requested a California Highway Patrol helicopter and the patient was hoisted off the mountain by CHP H-16 and USFS rangers. Total time of rescue from 911 call to hoist: approximately 1 hour.

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### **06.04.2023 - Avalanche Gulch, rockfall, outfitter guide - male, 37**

At 0630 hours on June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2023 in Avalanche Gulch near The Heart (11,500 feet) a client of an outfitter guide group was struck in the lower leg (tib/fib) by a melon sized rock, resulting in an open tip/fig fracture. Emergency response was immediately requested. Guides and savvy local skiers stopped the bleeding, stabilized, and wrapped the injury. Forest Service climbing ranger Sam Clairmont was notified of the incident by ranger Meyers. Clairmont responded immediately from Helen Lake base camp. Siskiyou County requested helicopter evacuation. California Highway Patrol was on scene within an hour and with the assistance of ranger Clairmont and others, successfully hoisted the patient off the mountain for emergency surgery.

Rockfall has increased. Lower mountain conditions still host good snow coverage. The upper mountain is melting out rapidly and has less snow with many rocks showing. Natural and human caused rockfall has been prevalent.

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### **06.16.2023 – Clear Creek, “missing” climber**

On Friday, June 16, Siskiyou County was notified of a missing climber on the Clear Creek route of Mount Shasta. The climber had been overdue for 30 hours and loved ones had lost communication and called 911. Forest Service Mount Shasta Climbing Rangers mobilized to the trailhead to begin search efforts on snowmobiles and skis. A California Highway Patrol (CHP) helicopter was launched and quickly able to spot a climber descending the mountain at around 10,000 feet. CHP made visual and verbal contact with the climber, and positively identified them as the missing climber. The climber indicated that they did not want help. CHP and climbing rangers stood down, and returned to quarters.

On Sunday, June 18, two days later, climbing rangers were notified again by the Siskiyou County Sheriff's department that the same climber was still missing and had, once again, stopped communication with family. The climber had now been on the mountain for five to six days for a route that normally takes one to two days. Rangers mobilized to begin a search. Two climbing rangers launched from Clear Creek trailhead on snowmobiles, while two other rangers prepared for CHP helicopter insertion onto the upper mountain. It was just then the climber popped out on a road was randomly located a quarter mile from the trailhead. The climber was in good condition, and all staff returned home.

The 911 calls were placed by family members, never from the climber himself. Both instances, the climber was surprised to see SAR members and was not in need of help. This was a frustrating incident for SAR personnel.

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### **7.15.2023 - Avalanche Gulch, slip and fall - female, 65**

Details are not well-known with this one. A 65 year old female twisted her knee on the Avalanche Gulch route of Mount Shasta near 9,200 feet. The call first came in as heat exhaustion but then later was determined as a knee injury. Communication lines were scrambled with this rescue. California Highway Patrol was in the air and responding before any real information could be gleaned. With a crew of three, they were able to execute the rescue without USFS or Siskiyou County assistance.

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### **09.19.2023 – Clear Creek, slip and fall - male, 21**

At approximately 1600 hours on 9/19, USFS Climbing Ranger Nick Meyers received a phone call from CHP Northern Air Ops out of Redding, CA, reporting an injured climber on Mount Shasta with a broken leg/ankle, ~13,000 feet, Clear Creek route, near Mushroom Rock. Coordinates: 41.404178, -122.189429

Meyers met CHP at Mercy Mount Shasta at 1630. CHP inserted Meyers to the location via Bauman Screamer Suit. Meyers packaged the patient and CHP hoisted the climber



off the mountain to Mercy Hospital at ~1745. All personnel were off the mountain by 1830.

Austin said he goes “hiking” a couple times a year, but Mt Shasta was a huge step up in terms of difficulty. He accidentally slipped and fell descending the “headwall” portion of the Clear Creek route above Mushroom Rock. His ankle was broken in three locations and he received small abrasions to his face. He was wearing a helmet.