

Denver Safety and Leadership Newsletter

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Welcome New Leaders



Congratulations to newly certified trip leaders **Heather Daigle, Joe Esseichick, Elliott Forcier, David Schmid, and Sarah Strandjord**. Help these new leaders get off to a good start by signing up for their trips and offering to co-lead.

Avalanche NEWS

February was one of the deadliest months for avalanches in the past 10 years, according to the Colorado Avalanche Information Center (CAIC). Five back country skiers or snowboarders died so far this winter season, three of them in a four-day span in February.



The Denver Post recently published a story about avalanche safety, quoting CMC's Director of Education, **Doug Maiwurm**, which you can see here: <https://theknow.denverpost.com/2019/02/15/avalanchesafety-colorado/208327/>

DS&L member and WTS Senior Instructor **Tom Hartzell** also interviewed a fellow CMC member who survived an avalanche last year. Here's his account:

Getting Buried in an Avalanche: The Rest of the Story

One of the great benefits a member gets from teaching a CMC class is the lessons they learn from their students -- some of which are learned the hard way. One student told us he was buried in an avalanche last February (the CAIC report is available in the link below). This article addresses the steps his group took to avoid an avalanche, and what occurred in spite of taking those steps. The CAIC report describes how the avalanche occurred and it is helpful to review it in order to understand the rest of this account.

https://avalanche.state.co.us/caic/acc/acc_report.php?acc_id=654&accfm=inv

The Participants. There were four people in the group; one person (Rider 1) had joined the CMC a year before the accident. The other three people were not CMC members. Names are not being used at their request.

Rider 1 had completed his AIARE Level 1 avalanche training outside CMC, and had also completed the CMC's Wilderness First Aid course. Skier 2 had also completed AIARE Level 1 avalanche training and is a Nurse Practitioner. Rider 2 and Skier 1 had no previous avalanche or first aid training, but the group had practiced using beacon, probe, and shovel several times in different locations prior to setting out on their multi-day hut trip.

The Trip. All four people followed the route using their paper maps and/or their GPS units and GaiaGPS cell phone apps. They had also talked with hut trip management prior to laying out their route. Once on the trail, they reviewed the route they would take and tested every person's beacon prior to setting out each morning. They also reviewed the CAIC's avalanche forecast every day prior to the incident, but were not able to receive the forecast the morning of the avalanche due to poor cell service.

The Conditions. Nine inches of new snow fell the day of the avalanche. Even without a CAIC forecast the group knew the avalanche danger would be

increased and took slope level measurements numerous times as they ascended a slope. At no time did they experience any of the classical signs of avalanche activity like cracks in the snow; “whumping” sounds; or recent avalanches. They did observe new wind loading however, and Rider 2 also noted that the snow “felt different.”

Post-Avalanche. As discussed in the CAIC’s report, Rider 2 stated Rider 1 was buried in about five feet of snow for 10-12 minutes (vs. the 15 minutes reported by the CAIC); Rider 1 was sure it had only been 3-4 minutes when first asked. He was positioned in a swimmer’s position, with his head lower than his feet. He could wiggle the fingers on one hand but couldn’t move otherwise. He concentrated on controlling his breathing when he sensed he was starting to lose consciousness. He soon felt Skier 2’s probe hitting him and also heard Skier 2 calling out to him; that’s when he started yelling back to Skier 2. Skier 2 was able to dig him out shortly after that. (And in spite of traveling over 50 feet and being pinned against some small trees while buried, Rider 1 sustained no serious injuries!)

After digging Rider 1 out of the snow, Skier 2 and Rider 2 quickly concentrated on assisting Skier 1 who was partially buried and in a lot of pain from an injured leg. While no member of the group was carrying an insulated pad, they were able to support Skier 1 and his leg on packs they laid out. Skier 2 assessed Skier 1 and concluded that he probably had sustained a broken femur; that assessment was subsequently confirmed and treated at the hospital.

SPOT Came in Handy (Mom Too!). Having participated in numerous winter trips in the past, Skier 2 routinely carries a SPOT device and had initiated a call for help once they had Skier 1 stabilized. Skier 2’s mother had been designated by Skier 2 as the person to notify in an emergency. She received a call from the SPOT’s call center letting her know that her son had initiated a “knowing their location.” (Or words to that effect.) She immediately told them her son was very experienced, and that he would not initiate a distress call unless it was an emergency.

An evacuation by helicopter was then requested. The helo pilot said that they probably would have waited until morning due to the weather and time of day if Skier 2’s mother had not provided her insights. After Skier 2 started to hike back to the hut to get help, Skier 1 started to shiver violently and seemed as if he was starting to lose consciousness. Riders 1 and 2 tried to keep him as

warm and comfortable as possible and maintained low-key conversation with him – something Skier 1 found very comforting. Riders 1 and 2 were making plans to dig a snow cave for the night just prior to the helo arriving.

Lessons Learned? When asked, Rider 1 responded he now carries a SPOT Gen3; an avy Airbag; and an extra puffy jacket. He also said the group did not take a slope level measurement at the point they started skiing and riding down the slope, and that their pace to get to that area felt rushed. Even though they did not feel they were on the steeper portion of the slope, Rider 1 noted that the slope angle changed at the crown of the avalanche where the shape of the slope was convex -- a classic avalanche trigger point. He did not feel the group was prepared to spend a night in that wilderness, even though each person was carrying an extra layer of clothing as well as snacks and water.

In spite of doing a number of things right, the avalanche was triggered by traveling over a weak, loose layer next to the ground on a portion of the slope that wasn't as steep as the portion in the center of the chute. The group now avoids chutes with similar dangers and recognizes an avalanche can be triggered in terrain below a steep slope or in areas that aren't as steep as those mapped as "No Go" areas.

Leaders Needed for BLM and Rampart Range Hikes



By Steve Bonowski, Denver Group Conservation Committee

Denver Group Conservation is partnering this year with State Conservation as well as the Pikes Peak and Western Slope Groups to lead hikes to BLM wilderness study areas and into the Rampart East Roadless Area, between Devils Head and Woodland Park.

Maps and other information for the 72 BLM areas all over the state are available from Membership Services in the CMC office: office@cmc.org or call 303-279-3080. The first trip goes out March 9 to the Demaree Canyon WSA

northwest from Grand Junction. Refer to that trip description for what a WSA trip looks like. BLM areas are on the Western Slope and in the Arkansas River Valley between Salida and Canon City.

We'll run at least one trip in early summer to Storm Peak in the Roadless Area. Here is a good opportunity to learn about this area so close to Denver, and plan for your own trip leads there.

Leading BLM trips as exploratory hikes is fine. If trips to these areas are of interest to you, please contact Steve Bonowski at climbersteveb@gmail.com.

Camping in the Rain

By John Walters

John is a veteran Denver Group leader, but like all of us, is still learning. Here, he shares some lessons from a camping trip in Staunton State Park.



1. **Set-Up.** Think through how to set up your tent in the rain before you have to. Will you be by yourself? Will there be others to help you? Will you need to help another set up first? Having rain on tent floors is probably inevitable, but how do you minimize it?

2. **Mop-Up.** Pack a camp towel for easy access at the top of your backpack or duffel. If you have to set up in the rain, you'll need a towel to mop up the floor of the tent before stowing your gear. I had a camp towel, but it was in the bottom of my duffel and the stuff inside the duffel got wet just looking for it. I gave up looking until I got the duffel inside the tent, but after finding the towel, had to mop around partially stowed gear. Some gear got moist from lying on the wet tent floor.

3. **Storage Bags.** My backpack and duffel were soaked before I could get them under shelter, but since I had all my rain-sensitive gear stored in individual

waterproof storage bags, the critical stuff – including sleeping bag, puffy, and clothes –stayed dry.

4. Waterproof Rain Gear. Do this every year. I had waterproofed mine for a previous trip, so it was ready for action. My rain gear wetted out, but the moisture never seeped through to my clothing.

5. What You Sleep On Is As Important as What You Sleep In.

I wanted to check out my “Cold Never Again” -20 degree bag. It is a Big Agnes system, with no insulation underneath. BA relies on an insulated sleeping pad to keep the cold ground from sapping your body heat. I thought my BA Insulated Q-Core pad, plus two-thirds of a Z-Pad under that, would be enough. Not so. I still got cold, but from the ground. I slept in merino long johns and my topside was warm as toast. But I could feel the cold ground in my shoulder, back, hips, and legs. The BA system doesn’t work as well as advertised. And our low temp was only a mild high-30s. Will have to find a much warmer pad for under the BA bag, or return the bag.

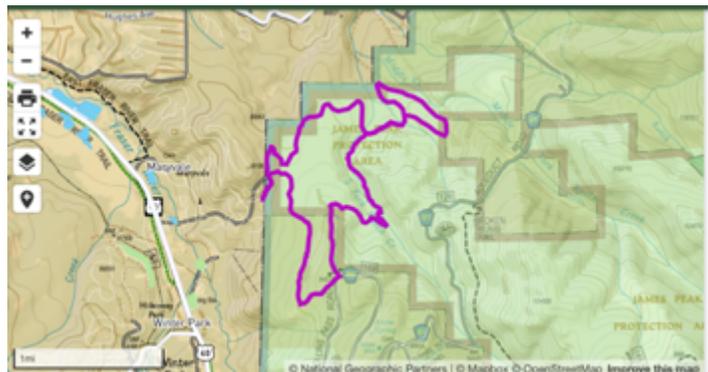
6. Use a Foam Pad for Kneeling at the Entrance to Your Tent.

I knew this, but really needed the pad this time, as I spent a lot of time leaning in the tent, mopping up the floor, and arranging my gear. I carry a 40% length of Z-Pad strapped to my backpack as a sitting pad and also as my tent entrance pad. The other 60% I carry in my duffel for camping, to place under my sleeping pad for insulation, and as a backup in case my sleeping pad deflates.

Lots of details? Yes. Because it’s the minutiae that make or break a great camping experience.

Are You a Track Recorder?

If so, you should get on the Jeff Stevens’ email list at cmctracks@gmail.com. Jeff sends out occasional tips to a group of 50 or more Track File Manager users, including 25-30 leaders.



His latest email walks users through the process of recovering a trip after you absent-mindedly drive off with the clock still running on your GPS device. (The first clue might be that you never hit 70 mph on your best day!).

One Last Item, a Request from Robbie Monsma and the Denver Member Initiative Committee

Durrie and I are set up to lead a New Member Hike to the Roxborough Park Meadows Trails on Sunday, May 5, just a few days after returning home from a month out of the country. Mostly worried we won't be here to answer hiker questions pre-hike.

If you can take on this trip, we'd sure appreciate it. Just substitute yourself for me as trip leader and update the contact information. If no one has signed up yet, you can change the trip to another location, meet place, etc.

This is the edit page:

<https://www.cmc.org/TripsAdmin/TripSearch/tabid/344/ctl/Edit/mid/1149/ID/44570/Default.aspx>

Thank you all from the Denver Member Initiative Committee. Ascending Hikes, New Member Hikes, and Beginner Snowshoe Trips all were readily taken on this year by our Denver Group Trip Leaders. It's great for our members to meet a variety of leaders and we thank you!