Amateurs in Action

Recounts of ham radio operators who have used their effort and skills to help others in a time of need

Rescue on Uncompahgre



Bob KCØCY (now KØNR)

It was Saturday 08 August 1992, before "mobile" phones were commonly available, Bob Witte KCØCY, his brother, and two nephews had just summitted Uncompahgre Peak and signed the log. He called out on 146.520 (the National Simplex) on his Kenwood TH-77A handheld to contact anybody listening to let them know of their achievement. Chris Webb NQ5V, possibly vacationing away from his Texas home, was the first to answer.

As Bob and company were about to start down the mountain, they were met by a young man who said he was sent to find "the guy with the radio." Bob then asked Chris to stand by while he looked into a potential medical emergency. After a second hiker approached Bob and related the same incident with more details, Bob asked Chris, and afterwards Arnold Stroud W7JRC to call the authorities and alert EMS to the situation.

Arnold got hold of the Ouray County Sheriff's Office and related the emergency. While monitoring, Jim Silverthorn NR5Y announced that he had contacted the Mineral County Sheriff's Office. Soon, Doug Schwinn NØLAY jumped onto the National Simplex to offer radio assistance, because he had been monitoring them and communication by the Hinsdale County (the actual county of the incident) Sheriff regarding the situation. *Once Doug gave me the Sheriff's frequency, I programmed it into my Kenwood HT and started monitoring too*, reported Bob.

As more EMS arrived at the scene, it became clearer that the victim was a young lady hiker who got hit in the face by a falling rock that had worked loose and hurtled down at her. She was unable to walk on her own, so the emergency crew dispatched a chopper to help get her off the mountain. The one Hinsdale *Flight-for-Life* helicopter was already deployed, so they requested help from a non-equipped two-seater, which was able to pick her up and take her to the trailhead, where an ambulance was waiting.



Unforgivable Uncompahgre Peak

According to the SAR (Search and Rescue) guy on a trail bike, the girl had facial cuts, internal bleeding, lost some teeth, and had facial swelling, but was otherwise in stable condition. He said that, with the radio contact, he would likely have gotten the call about the time his shift ended. Doug calculates that this means amateur radio had cut down the response time by nearly five hours. *It has certainly caused me to take this emergency communication thing more seriously.*

You can read more about the rescue on Bob's Blog and another by Bob's nephew Mark.