



# The Mountain Rescue Page

## RMRG's Busiest Year Ever, 163 Calls in 2012!

**Katie Johnson, et al.**

In 2012, Rocky Mountain Rescue Group (RMRG) broke its record for the most calls in a year, responding to 163 total calls, which included 29 searches and 65 rescues. This number is about 20 more than our 2007-2011 average of 142 and reflects a trend of an increasing number of rescues each year in many jurisdictions around the country.

Fortunately, the vast majority of these calls had happy endings. Although many of our patients required medical intervention, most were able to recover fully in time. Unfortunately, 2012

also included a notable string of difficult missions with unhappy endings. Between June 22 and September 2, RMRG responded to eight different calls in which the patients were either deceased (seven patients) or never found. These calls, especially when occurring with frequencies of nearly one per week and with many taking multiple days to complete, can significantly impact even the most seasoned rescuer. In this story, we'll highlight a few of these emotionally difficult missions.

On Friday, June 22, we were notified that a car belonging to a CU student already reported missing had been found at NCAR, the National Center for Atmospheric Research, in southwest Boulder. We turned out en masse to search through an extremely hot afternoon, and as sunset neared, eventually found the missing young man near the base of a rock formation high on Dinosaur Mountain. Sadly, he did not survive, and our rescue became a body recovery.

Body recoveries are initially considered crime scenes, so once a deceased patient is found, plenty of time usually passes for reflection before more rescuer activity is required. Excepting the reason for our presence, this particular night was lovely and tranquil as we watched darkness set in and the city lights come out. It was definitely the type of setting to inspire appreciation of our gifts and for the natural beauty that surrounds us.

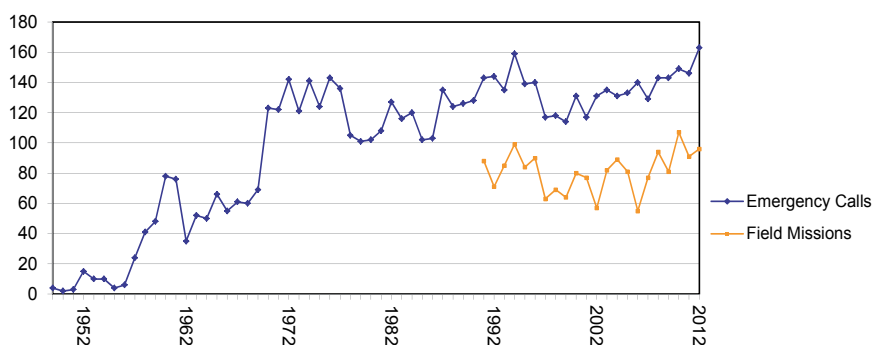
Later in the night, when the investigation was complete, we performed a technical operation including two separate up-hauls, a vertical evacuation, two sections of scree evacuation, and finally a trail carry to the road.

A week and a half later, on July 3, RMRG responded to our second of the eight tragic calls. The as-yet-unresolved search for 74-year-old Pat Wallace received a great deal of press coverage and may be familiar to our readers. Wallace was hiking with friends above Camp Dick when she became separated and did not return

to the trailhead. The formal, organized search, which included many agencies, lasted five days, during which frustratingly few clues were found. RMRG members continued to search for months on their own time, but sadly Wallace's disappearance remains a mystery.

From July 17 to August 23, RMRG members participated in four additional searches that ended in body recoveries, two in Boulder County, one on Mt. Bierstadt, and one at Mt. Falcon. It is common for Colorado SAR teams to provide mutual aid to other teams needing support for major operations such as this one.

Then, on August 26, RMRG was paged back to the area near Camp Dick for another missing party. An out-of-town visitor had failed to arrive at the airport for his scheduled flight on August 24. Eventually his rental car was found on the road to the west of Camp Dick. The search was complicated by the fact that it was already dark when RMRG was paged, but members arrived to search nonetheless. That night, we hiked the primary trails in the area, calling out to the missing man and listening to the echoes from other search teams also hiking through the valley. After some hours with no response and no clues, members returned to the trailhead with the intent of performing a more extensive search when daylight returned. Sadly, the missing person was found by RMRG members near his tent on the second day of searching. The evacuation included assistance from our northern neighbor, Larimer County Search and Rescue.



## RMRG's Busiest Year (Continued from page 1)

The last in our concentrated string of bad endings took place in Boulder Canyon on September 2. In this case, RMRG did not need to perform a search or body recovery because the patient had fallen onto the road. However, RMRG did perform one of our other services to the county, which is to assist the Sheriff's Office with investigations of climbing accidents and to recover the patient's gear from the rock face.

Despite this string of sad endings, RMRG members also took part in many gratifyingly successful operations during the same time period. In fact, we received 66 total calls during the June 22 – September 2 time period. In one of our busier single days, RMRG (with the help of our southern neighbor, Alpine Rescue Team) executed three concurrent missions on the Friday afternoon/evening of August 17. The first was the vertical rescue and evacuation of an injured hiker who became lost, and then fell on the 13,403' South Arapahoe Peak. The injured hiker fell while scrambling through 5th class terrain to find a path down the mountain. The injured hiker's daughter also became "cliffed out" (unable to move due to the terrain) and required rescue. During this evacuation, RMRG was paged to search for a lost Korean-speaking mushroom hunter. While staging for this search, local EMS was paged to a car off the road near the search staging area. RMRG responded and provided advanced life support and a technical evacuation to the road. The mushroom hunter was found alive and well a few hours later by rescuers.

These kinds of success stories can keep us coming back for more even in the face of great sadness. However, our thoughts continue to be with the loved ones of all of the patients whom we were unable to bring back alive.

## RMRG Member Profile: Sal Silvester

**Greg Tucker**

After several years of visiting his brother in Boulder—four, five, and sometimes six times a year—Sal Silvester realized he should just move to Colorado. Twelve years later, he couldn't be happier with that decision. Sal is an ROTC graduate and has been stationed in Turkey, Atlanta, and Kuwait, working primarily in the finance sectors of the military. After finishing his service, he settled in Atlanta for a bit before deciding to make Colorado his home in 2001.

Two years after moving to Boulder, Sal read an article about RMRG in a newspaper and decided to join. He was looking for a way to volunteer some of his free time in the community, and RMRG allows him to leverage his experiences in the outdoors at the same time. Before moving to Colorado, Sal was rock climbing and mountain biking throughout Tennessee, Georgia, and Alabama. Sal is an active guy. He has competed on Adventure Racing Teams, completed six marathons, and finished an Ironman Triathlon.

Teamwork and leadership are major themes in Sal's life. As a former Army officer and active RMRG member, he knows the value

of a group that works well together towards achieving a collective goal. Professionally, he is also the founder of an organizational development consulting firm. His company coaches executive teams and leaders on team development, effective leadership, and igniting the potential in people. He published his first book on leadership in June 2012 and is currently working on his second.

His most memorable mission was a rescue on Little Pawnee Peak in the Indian Peaks Wilderness in August 2010. The team had to perform a dangerous scree evacuation to rescue a climber injured at the top of a steep couloir filled with large, loose blocks. While carrying the injured climber down in a litter, a boulder began rolling after them. Sal and another RMRG member quickly covered the patient with their bodies to protect him, and when the boulder reached the rescue team, it stopped directly on top of Sal's arm. Fortunately, there were other rocks surrounding his arm that held the boulder up and prevented it from crushing him. His arm was completely fine. The group recovered and delivered the injured climber to a landing zone where he was airlifted to safety.

Sal is usually involved in about 10 missions a year, but his involvement in the RMRG fluctuates. As of this July, he has already been involved in 12 missions. "It's a part of my life that I always want to be there," says Sal. And he has made several close friends in RMRG who share his passion for climbing and mountaineering. He went on his second trip to Ecuador with three other RMRG members and climbed Illiniza Norte, where they attempted Illiniza Sur and Antisana but were prevented from summiting by adverse conditions.

Congratulations to Sal and his wife Rachel who have just had their first child together, Eli, who is the highlight of their life.



Sal on a vertical evacuation

Dave Christenson

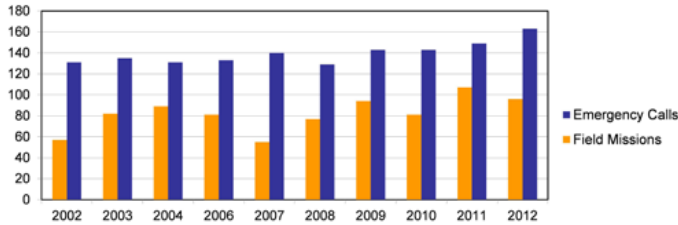


## Mission Statistics

Steve Dundorf

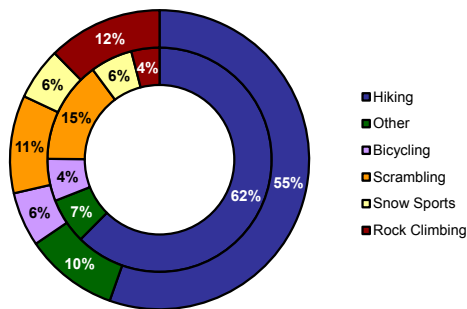
Our 2012 mission volume increased the 5-year average again with 163 calls for assistance and 96 field missions.

10 Year Mission Stats



Patients by Activity

(Inner Circle = 2012, Outer Circle = 5-Year Average)



## Other News

2013 is shaping up to be a very busy year for RMRG, even outside of rescues. Read on for several of our recent activities.

### Re-creditation



RMRG is a member of the Mountain Rescue Association, which re-accredits its members every five years. Over the weekend of the 4th and 5th of May, RMRG hosted over 35 evaluators and observers from 15 mountain rescue teams across Colorado and New Mexico. The members of these professional un-paid mountain rescue teams established challenging scenarios in high and low angle rope rescue, search,

avalanche rescue and technical snow rescue. RMRG passed all five scenarios to retain fully-accredited status. For more information, see [www.rockymountainrescue.org/fphoto2013Recert.php](http://www.rockymountainrescue.org/fphoto2013Recert.php).



## Climbing Safety Education



In addition to providing rescue services, RMRG's charter also includes safety education. In March 2013, RMRG presented a climbing safety talk at Neptune Mountaineering. The talk was based on the 2012 paper "Rock

Climbing Rescues: Causes, Injuries and Trends in Boulder County, Colorado" by Lack et. al., which was published in the Wilderness and Environmental Medicine Journal, and can be viewed at [www.rockymountainrescue.org/BoulderClimbingLessonsLearned.php](http://www.rockymountainrescue.org/BoulderClimbingLessonsLearned.php).

## Third Truck

RMRG obtained a third rescue vehicle, donated by the Boulder County



Sherriff's Office. The vehicle will enable us to have a dedicated vehicle for towing snow mobile and ATV trailers. It will also be used for out-of-county missions so that we can continue to dedicate our two primary response vehicles to serving Boulder County.

## Prospective Training Process

After many years using the same process for training and evaluating prospective members, RMRG has recently implemented a new prospective training process. Guests interested in becoming members may always attend Wednesday evening meetings, but must now complete at least four of five required sessions prior to joining the team at our regular Sunday practices. RMRG is currently evaluating the effectiveness of this process to ensure we are achieving our training goals. For more information, see [www.rockymountainrescue.org/get\\_involved.php](http://www.rockymountainrescue.org/get_involved.php).

## RMRG Fashion ...

After the highly successful implementation of the now widely recognized RMRG royal blue mountain rescue shirt, we now have RMRG mountain rescue jackets! Comments back from our rescuers have been very positive. Thank you to MontBell for their support of this effort.



## Sneak Preview - Newsletter 2014



In the last decade Boulder County has seen its fair share of natural disasters including record snows and avalanches, severe drought, and major fires. In 2013, Boulder County experienced simultaneous 100-year floods and a 1,000-year rain event. RMRG and many other agencies were called into action for yet another natural disaster!

Thank you to our 2012 supporters!



Steve Dundorf

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## Mountain Rescue: It's Free! Spread the Word!

**Steve Dundorf**

You'll find this on the back page too, "We Never Charge for Rescue." Despite this fact and our ongoing efforts to get the word out, many remain unaware. So please do your part, and let others know. This year, we found that numerous people delayed calling for help because they thought they would have to pay for the search and rescue. Rest assured, RMRG has never charged someone for a rescue and continues to maintain that stance. Here are some frequently asked questions:

**Why Don't We Charge For Rescue?** RMRG's position is based on direct experience that fears of bills for rescue services delay and complicate rescue operations. Such delays can extend daylight rescues into more dangerous and difficult night rescues. Weather that is good earlier in the day can become worse as the day goes on, exposing rescuers to increased risk of lightning and more hazardous conditions during an evacuation.

**Who Else has Statements Against Charging for Rescue?** Colorado Search and Rescue Board (CSRB), Mountain Rescue Association (MRA), National Association for Search And Rescue (NASAR)

**Who Does Charge?** Ambulance companies and hospitals charge for their services. This includes ground ambulances and air ambulances (helicopters).

**Can I refuse care and/or transportation from the ambulance service?** Yes, if you meet the following conditions, you can refuse care and/or transport: 1) You are at least age 18, an emancipated minor, or in the military 2) You are deemed to be competent and able to make rational decisions and 3) You have been informed and understand the nature of your illness or injury and understand the potential complications that may arise from declining medical care. Reference: Boulder County EMS protocols, section 1:9

### Help Support Our Mission

Please consider the  
**Rocky Mountain Rescue Group**  
in your Year End Donations!

We depend on your generous donations for 30% of our annual operating budget. Without your help, we couldn't be there when needed. Thank you.

[www.RockyMountainRescue.org/fundraising.php](http://www.RockyMountainRescue.org/fundraising.php)

## In Service

If you would like more information about RMRG, please visit our web site at [www.RockyMountainRescue.org](http://www.RockyMountainRescue.org). Also, please consider that we are an all-volunteer organization with no paid positions. About 40% of our yearly budget comes from private donations. RMRG is an IRS 501(c)3 charitable organization, and all contributions to RMRG are tax deductible. We accept donations at our web site or by check (made out to Rocky Mountain Rescue Group). Checks can be mailed to:

**Rocky Mountain Rescue Group, Inc.**  
**3720 Walnut St.**  
**Boulder, CO 80301**



Winners of the "Rescue Olympics" practice

Dave Christenson

## Newsletter Distribution:

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"Rescue Olympics" practice.

Dave Christenson



# Rocky Mountain Rescue Group Goes to China

Greg Tucker



RMRG member contemplating a Buddhist temple in the Shuangqiao Valley.

Jake Entin

In September 2012, seven members of Rocky Mountain Rescue Group (RMRG) and five members of Summit County Rescue (SCRG) spent two weeks in the Sichuan province of China with the Sichuan Mountaineering Association (SMA). The trip was reciprocal to the visit the SMA made to Colorado in 2010, which was motivated by the SMA's response to the avalanche in Sichuan that took the lives of Boulderites Jonny Copp, Michah Dash and Wade Johnson in 2009.

compare, RMRG has averaged over 120 emergency calls a year over the past decade and had 163 calls in 2012. There were no missions during the two weeks of the exchange. Since Boulder County is a popular destination for outdoor recreationists, has several larger cities nearby, and an effective system for requesting rescue, RMR responds to a much wider range of emergencies, from major rock climbing accidents, to twisted ankles, to lost hikers. The SMA, on the other hand, mainly receives requests for major emergencies like avalanches, earthquakes, and missing people. Often, it is the Chinese government that requests the SMA's assistance in search and recovery. The SMA also provides mountain guide services for locals and visitors to the Sichuan region.

After arriving and spending the first few days of their trip in Chengdu, the capital of the Sichuan province, the group of rescuers travelled to Mt. Siguniang National Park where they spent four days in a small hotel giving presentations and providing field training to the SMA. The visitors instructed the SMA on topics such as basic rope work, avalanche response, low-angle evacuation, working in vertical terrain, mechanical systems, and search strategy. Most of the technical systems and strategies the SMA uses are designed for individual rescuers, so the training focused a lot on what would benefit the SMA as a team.

Although they had translators, SMA members don't speak much English, so the visiting lecturers had to word their lessons as simply as they could while still effectively communicating the information. Many of the topics they covered involved technical terms and phrases that are not easily translated, so the speakers slowed down to explain in a very deliberate way, distilling complicated ideas into their essence. For a group that has been teaching mountain rescue strategies and procedures mainly to English-speaking mountain climbers, it was a challenging but rewarding teaching experience.

At the end of four days of focusing on mountain rescue education, the visitors and their hosts finally had a chance to explore the region and climb and hike together. Of the area they visited, RMRG member



Currently, the SMA is a loosely organized group that resembles RMRG in its early days as Boulder's organized mountain rescue was ramping up in the '50s. They have little funding, lack the systems needed to receive rescue requests, and have little experience with high-tech equipment. But China's national mountaineering association is looking to improve rescue across the country. They have approached the Mountain Rescue Association (MRA) in the U.S. and shown interest in participating in more exchanges in the future. China hopes to set up a mountain rescue system similar to that of various MRA teams.

The SMA doesn't respond to nearly as many emergency requests as RMRG or SCRG, handling only 5-10 a year. To



SMA, SCRG and RMR members bring a close to the official rescue exchange in the Siguniangshan National Park. From here rescuers spent 10 days climbing peaks, and visiting various cultural sites in the Sichuan province.

Dan Lack



Dan Lack said, “The terrain that these guys have to work in is more extreme than Boulder. They have some pretty significant mountains—higher than in Colorado— forests, glaciers, ice climbing regions, and, because it’s so remote and expansive, it takes them a long time to get there. It’s also a pretty unstable area, and a lot of their response has been to earthquakes and avalanches. They’re usually doing body recovery and not rescues.” The challenge of setting up and providing a rescue system in the area is evident. The highest peak at Mt Siguniang is Yaomei Feng, or “peak of the youngest sister,” stands over 20,000 feet and is the second tallest in the province.

By the end of the two-week trip, the groups involved, who had been brought together by their love of the outdoors and their desire to help others, had gotten to know each other well. Even with communication limited at times to what could be translated with a smart phone, participants were impressed by how well they came to communicate with each other. For everyone involved, it was a trip they will not soon forget.



Training in the Shuangqiao Valley including uphaul systems.

Alison Sheets



Training in the Shuangqiao Valley including uphaul systems.

Dale Wang

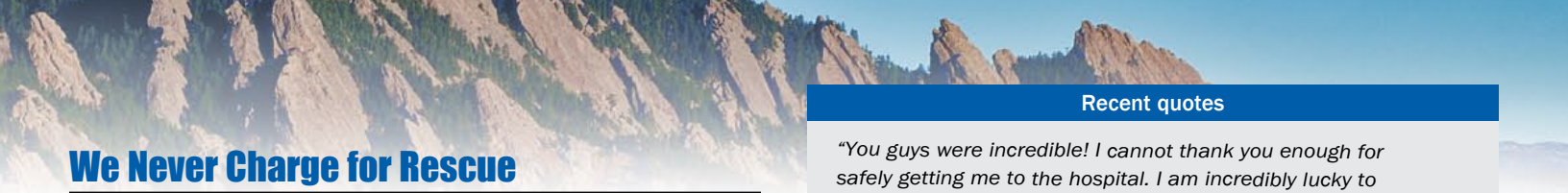


Dan Lack



Returning from Mt. Siguniang National Park.

Dale Wang



## We Never Charge for Rescue

RMRG does not charge for search and rescue under any circumstances. Our position is guided by the experience that people's concerns regarding billing can delay and complicate rescue operations. We are members of the Colorado Search and Rescue Board and the Mountain Rescue Association, both of which also oppose billing for mountain search and rescue services. Other agencies may also be involved in patient services and RMRG cannot control billing practices of these other agencies. For more information please see [www.RockyMountainRescue.org/Charging4Rescue.php](http://www.RockyMountainRescue.org/Charging4Rescue.php).

### Rocky Mountain Rescue is an all-volunteer 501(c)3 non-profit charitable organization

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#### Recent quotes

*"You guys were incredible! I cannot thank you enough for safely getting me to the hospital. I am incredibly lucky to have minimal injuries and I will recover fully. Thank you Thank you"*  
– Scott C.

*"Thanks RMRG for the stellar mission to stabilize and evac Scott from Kloof Alcove yesterday. Awesome leadership, organization and execution by the team! You guys are pros. May God Bless your work."*  
– Joseph C.

*"Thank you. My faith in humanity was doing all right before this whole incident, but this was an eye-opening experience. Never in my life have I met such an incredible group of people, and never before had I fully realized that there are complete strangers out there who will come through and save your ass when you really need it. And not just save you, but be glad to do it. Just amazing."*  
– Sara H.

*"Thank you so much for locating and rescuing my husband. Myself and his kids are very grateful to all of you."*  
– Jennifer J.



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