



Emergency Evacuation Incident

NOTE: This is the sanitized version; i.e., names and job titles removed. Thus it may readily be used for training, education, or whatever. It will give the reader an idea of what is involved in a mountain rescue in the way of time, manpower and effort.

During the period 24-25-26-27-28-29 May 2002 I was at Maupin Field to do and teach trail maintenance on the Appalachian Trail with a crew from the Tidewater Appalachian Trail Club. After most of my crew had left, and just before 6:00 p.m. on May 26th, a Boy Scout Leader (from southeastern Virginia) appeared at the Maupin Field Shelter. He started talking to the through-hikers there about an emergency one of his older Scouts had experienced on the Mau-Har Trail. Knowing I was a trail maintainer, the through-hikers referred the Scout leader to me and he came to our tent site.

One of his scouts, a 14-16 year old boy, about 4:15 p.m., had fallen 6-8 feet off the Mau-Har Trail near the waterfall, 1½-miles south of Maupin Field shelter. The Scouts had all their backpacking gear, food and water and were in good shape. The boy with the fall had injured his hip and could neither walk nor put weight upon it. Vital signs (respiration, heart rate, etc.) were normal, and he was conscious. His backpack had evidently protected his back and head from injury.

The Scout leader had come requesting help and emergency evacuation. Neither the Scouts nor we maintainers had the equipment to carry the boy out that steep, narrow, rugged trail. We tried the Scout leader's and my partner's cell phones to reach the Wintergreen Fire and Rescue Squad, the nearest and appropriate responder - not unexpectedly no signal. I said I would drive out to Love Gap, knock on a door and phone the squad. The Scout leader was to stay in the Maupin Field area to brief the squad when they arrived. My partner knew the area and would help with any information he could provide.

I drove out to Love Gap and knocked on a door. I very briefly explained the circumstances. The homeowner immediately dialed 911 and handed me the phone. I quickly summarized the situation to the dispatcher and asked to be connected to the Wintergreen Fire and Rescue Squad. The dispatcher was unable to do this, then put me very briefly on hold and tried to make contact - no go. He asked for my telephone number and said he would call back momentarily. Within 3-minutes the Wintergreen Fire and Rescue Squad was calling me. I briefed them on the fire road, the parking at Maupin Field, the narrow and steep Mau-Har Trail, and the Scout's situation, and said I would meet them at Love Gap in my white S-10.

Within a very few minutes the first vehicle from Wintergreen Fire and Rescue Squad arrived. The driver and I discussed the entire situation and, knowing the squad would have to do a 1½-mile carry up the Mau-Har trail, he put out a "manpower" call. As we talked, other personnel and Wintergreen Fire and Rescue

Squad vehicles arrived. I was to lead them in the fire road. When they were organized and ready, I led in the first pick up truckload of personnel and the Squad Truck.

At Maupin Field we met the Scout Leader. He and a couple of the rescue folks headed down the Mau-Har Trail carrying medical equipment, and marking the trail on the left side with pink flagging tape (their standard operating procedure so that all their folks, whenever they arrive, constantly know they are on the correct trail). Soon a group was on its way as well. By the time the rescue folks reached the injured Scout, the Scouts had managed to move him a very short distance up the trail to a level spot frequently used as a campsite. They had followed their training to make him comfortable, keep him warm, treat for shock, maintain hydration, get help, and etc.

I remained at Maupin Field to brief the rescue folks manning the squad truck and communication gear - showing them the trail head, the outhouse, and etc. When finished, I changed clothes, grabbed a water bottle, flashlight, and headlamp and, with a through-hiker from the shelter, headed on down the Mau-Har trail.

When we reached the rescue group, daylight was completely gone and it was quite dark. The squad had already carried the injured Scout on a litter a bit over a half mile up the very worst of the trail to the log steps at the loading platform above a stream crossing. There they had rigged a Stokes Litter, and were now another 1/8-mile or so up the trail with the 160-pound Scout. The through-hiker and I became #17 and #18 in the group.

The Stokes litter had a rope in the front for pulling, a short rope in the back for braking on downhill stretches (very few), and six to eight Stokes litter handlers. As the group progressed, folks made their way from the back of the group to the front of the group, taking turns at pulling or steadying the Stokes Litter. Since the trail is narrow, the Stokes litter handlers were on the steep uphill and downhill sides of the trail, in nettles and poison ivy, and on rough, uneven ground with oddball rocks, with logs where center sections had been removed from blowdowns, and stumps from broken trees. From up front there was a constant warning chatter about "log on the left, low bridge, rock on the right, tree on the left, and etc."

Except for maybe the two handlers on the front of the Stokes Litter all the other handlers could see were our own feet and a forward distance of 12 to 18-inches in front of our feet. These warning calls about obstacles were extremely helpful. At each

break, or as each additional person joined the group, we counted off from front to rear so the rear sweep always knew how many folks there were and that none had been skipped, overlooked, or left behind.

In some steeper areas, and for some stream crossings, we formed a two-lane bucket brigade, passing the Stokes Litter ahead from hand to hand. When trees were so close to the trail that there was no room for the handlers, we would stop and inch forward as each handler in turn let go, stepped around the tree, and regained a hold on the Stokes litter.

Many times we stopped and lifted the Stokes Litter gently over rocks and blowdowns. And yes, the squad folks kept a constant check on the injured Scout as we made our way up the trail. Occasionally a water bottle was passed up the line for folks to drink from.

By the time we reached Maupin Field we had 29 folks in the group with the Stokes litter. At Maupin Field we diverted to the right and took the outhouse trail up to the meadow, bypassing the check dams and waterbars on the shelter trail.

I think we arrived at Maupin Field about 10:30 p.m. or so.

At Maupin Field meadow the injured Scout was transferred to a pick up truck and taken out the fire road. The original plan had been to take him to the Augusta Medical Center. Where they actually took him I'm not sure. I was catching my breath and getting more water. The squad folks thought the hip/leg was not broken, and that the boy had suffered only a severe bruising.

In retrospect:

- Because your hands were occupied, headlamps were a great help.
- Counting off once in a while kept track of personnel.
- Progress made by these professionally skilled, caring, and dedicated personnel was superb **and** safe, and quite remarkable (I expected the evacuation to take much longer).
- The constant chatter about obstacles was a great help.
- The squad personnel and Scouts were extremely grateful that I had a vehicle and a key to the gate (this saved them over two hours in response and exit time !).
- The Scouts did a good job in presenting their problem and providing information, and in caring for their injured Scout until help arrived.
- And it was great to have the knowledge of the fire road and the trail, to know the appropriate rescue squad to call, and to be able to brief and help the rescue folks.

P.S. After they left Maupin Field that night, we never again heard from the Scout troop. But, several weeks later I had the privilege of meeting the Nelson County dispatcher I talked with on 911 to start the rescue.