

DEATH ON A MOUNTAIN

Article by MARTIN LINSKY

Illustrations by JOE JAQUA

Steven wore blue jeans and summer hiking boots. It was his first backpacking trip. And it would be his last.



THE TRIP BEGAN innocently enough. On Thanksgiving Day, 1974, two friends set out on a two-day hike in the High Peaks area of the Adirondack Mountains, south of Lake Placid, New York. Steven L. Collier and Patrick J. Eagan had been friends since attending Northeast Louisiana State University. Now Steven worked for the Eureka Tent Company in Binghamton, New York, and Patrick, 27 years old, was a teacher in Pennsylvania.

Steve, fit and weighing 165 pounds, was wearing waffle-type cotton long johns, blue jeans, a cotton flannel shirt, wool socks and summer hiking boots. Patrick was dressed similarly except for cotton corduroy knickers.

This was Steven's first

backpacking trip. And it would be his last.

A hint of snow was in the air as the men left the parking lot in the town of Newcomb at 5 P.M. and started the 1¼ miles to the Henderson lean-to, following yellow trail markers. At six o'clock they arrived at the shelter to find five other people occupying it. On the six-hour drive from Binghamton, Steven and Patrick had eaten only doughnuts, so they were hungry. They broke out their freeze-dried casseroles and packaged soup and heated them on Patrick's gas stove.

Patrick had his thermometer along. The temperature was 19 degrees Fahrenheit. They snuggled down in their sleeping bags at about eight o'clock as snow began to fall.

The two companions awoke at 8:30 the next morning, had a breakfast of tea and oatmeal and were on the trail by 9:30. They

had no liquids with them except for Patrick's flask of brandy. The party of five with whom they had shared the lean-to started out on the trail a little later.

Three hours later Steven and Patrick reached Summit Rock at Indian Pass. They had walked 2¾ miles from the lean-to and gained 800 feet of elevation. Each ate a light lunch of rolls, cheese, deviled ham and a mouthful of brandy. The flask was leaking, so there was hardly any left.

They had expected to have candy bars for trail snacks but had forgotten to buy them.

The day was bright—about 20 percent cloud cover—but the temperature was in the low twenties. Within a half-hour, they started up the Cold Brook Trail, which leads between Mount Clinton and Iroquois Peak to Lake Colden.

Much later, as they

neared the height of land between Clinton and Iroquois, a light snow began to fall. Patrick was breaking trail, and the climbing was strenuous. Here's how Patrick remembers the situation that afternoon:

"Steven was slowing down before we got to the top—as I was. I didn't want to stop until I got to the high point. When I did, I took my pack off and waited. The first person around was from the other party. He said: 'Your friend is back there a ways; he's not doing too good. He's got that I-don't-care-if-I-make-it attitude. And that's not good up here.'

"All five of them just tromped right on past. They were making pretty good time. So I went back down the trail—maybe 100 yards—before I finally found Steven. He was coming along slowly. He was obviously tired.

"I kind of walked him

How to Avoid Hypothermia

Hypothermia results when exposure and exhaustion cause the core temperature of the body to drop. It can take place in temperatures well above freezing. Although usually associated with the country, it can also occur in urban settings. Death can result within two hours.

Symptoms:

The symptoms change as the core temperature drops.

- ▶ 99-96 degrees—Intense shivering.
- ▶ 95-91 degrees—Violent shivering; speech difficulty; sluggish thinking; beginning of amnesia.
- ▶ 90-86 degrees—Shivering decreases or stops; muscular rigidity; skin blue or puffy; erratic movements; thinking less clear; victim usually retains posture and some contact with environment.
- ▶ 85-81 degrees—Stupor; irrationality; pulse and respiration slow; continued muscular rigidity.
- ▶ 80-78 degrees—Unconsciousness; erratic heartbeat; no reflexes.
- ▶ Below 78 degrees—Heart fibrillates; edema and hemorrhage in lungs; death.

Treatment:

There are three things that ought to be done as quickly as possible for the suspected victim.

- ▶ Prevent further heat loss.
- ▶ Rewarm victim as quickly as possible. Seek shelter immediately. Replace any wet clothing. Get him into a sleeping bag. Put a warm canteen in with him, or warm him with your own body. Feed victim lots of hot sweet liquids.
- ▶ Avoid complications.

Prevention:

Susceptibility to hypothermia is lessened by eating properly and getting enough sleep. Alcohol and tobacco hinder the body's ability to adjust to cold. Avoid them.

Keep warm. You can get warmth from your clothing, the sun, fire, hot food and drink; and from the body's metabolism in burning high-calorie sweet foods, and from muscular activity.

As for clothing, two light garments are warmer than a heavy one. Dress in layers and regulate your warmth by putting on and taking off garments. Wool is the only cloth that will keep you warm when wet. Because you can lose 50 percent of your body heat through the head, keep your head covered. When you stop walking, put on more clothing immediately. While you must be sure to keep warm, guard carefully against sweating because when your clothes get wet with perspiration they will quickly cool your body thereafter.

up to where I'd left my pack and gave him a piece of cheese. He ate it, and I said to him, let's take a breather."

By now Patrick was becoming concerned about the oncoming darkness and the cold. Steven wanted to take off his pack and rest for a while, but Patrick told him that the longer they waited, the longer it would take to get down to Charley Nolan's cabin. Charles Nolan was the year-round caretaker at the ranger station at Lake Golden.

THEY STARTED OFF AGAIN. Although the snow was 12 to 18 inches deep, the going was easier for Patrick because the party of five had broken trail. But the situation was becoming more and more difficult for Steven.

"The thing that struck me," Patrick recalls, "was that he couldn't walk more than 10 paces without falling. I had assumed that his pack was throwing him off balance. I told him to stop trying to run and take it easy—heels first and just shuffle along. We weren't floundering in the dark or anything because the light on the snow was good enough to see the trail. But he just could not keep his balance. He said once or twice, 'Why am I the only one who seems to be falling?'"

Patrick was aware of the tent and warm clothing in their packs. He even considered bivouacking but decided against it because he thought they weren't far from Nolan's cabin.

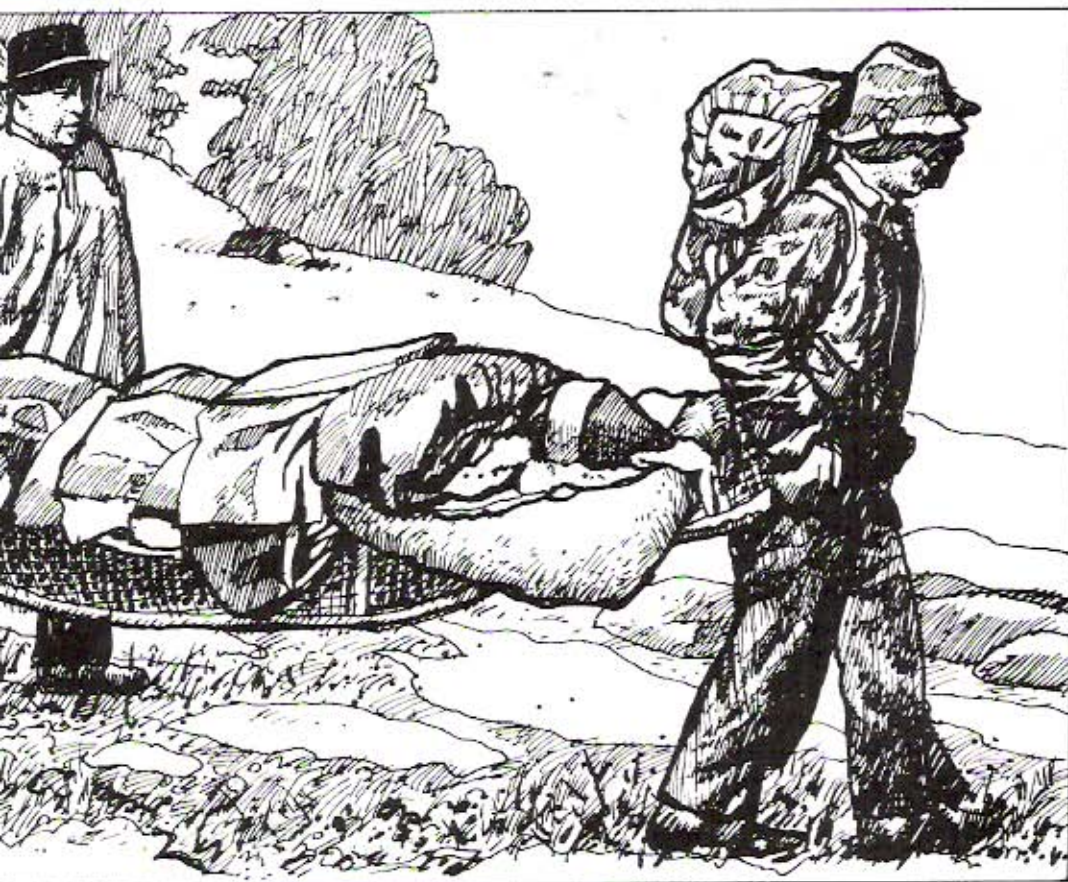
Steven eventually became unable to walk. Shortly before, he had broken through the ice covering a shallow brook and fallen in the water twice because he couldn't keep his balance. Moreover, a good deal of snow was



melting into his clothing from when he stumbled and fell in the snow.

Down the trail a bit, Patrick decided to go ahead for help. He estimated that they were about a quarter-mile from the ranger station. The distance was, in fact, a steep half-mile. "Looking down," Patrick remembers, "I could see the lake. I thought the best thing for me to do was to get down there quick and get back instead of taking time to get Steven in some kind of bag. I thought it would be best to get him into the warm cabin instead of trying to set up the tent. It was extremely difficult terrain." He says he was not familiar with hypothermia.

Before Patrick left, he put his down jacket on Steven, who could hardly get his arms into it. He remembers Steven sitting on the trail, exhausted, hatless (both men had lost their hats) and alone, his new



backpack beside him. It contained a down jacket, sleeping bag, pad and empty water bottle. He was to remain there by himself for about two hours.

Meanwhile, the party of five with whom Steven and Patrick had shared the lean-to the previous night arrived at Lake Colden. They established themselves in a lean-to just across the dam.

Arthur H. Reidel, 24, a computer programmer from Medford, Massachusetts, was also at Lake Colden, for the weekend. He had been visiting Charles Nolan for tea and conversation. On returning to his lean-to, he was a bit annoyed to find the five other people occupying it. "They were sprawled out all over the place—all over my things," Reidel says. "They didn't even cook themselves supper or anything hot to drink. They just got in their sleeping bags and

The rescue party had two alternatives: to attempt to warm him there, or to get him to the cabin as fast as they could.

were going to zonk out."

Nolan remembers Patrick coming to his cabin for help shortly after 7 P.M.

"I told him there was an M.I.T. graduate there who had had a lot of experience in the mountains—a chap I'd known for some time." So Nolan sent Patrick over to get Arthur Reidel, who was just beginning his supper. Reidel agreed to participate in the rescue mission, but the five others in the lean-to were not interested, even though they had passed Steven on the trail and knew what bad shape he was in.

REIDEL WENT TO the next lean-to up the creek, and the one after that, without success. Finally, at the fourth stop, he found

two hikers who were willing to get dressed and take part in the rescue.

Nolan believes that the group left the ranger station at about 8:30 P.M. By that time, Steven had been alone for an hour and a half. The temperature was 16 degrees, and there was a five- to 10-mile-an-hour wind.

"We started right up the trail dragging the snow boat," Reidel recalls. "It was very hard because it was very steep in a few places, and there wasn't quite enough snow, so there was a lot of exposed rock. It was very narrow and twisting, and the brook was open in a lot of places.

"We got up there and got to him—and geez, he was pretty far gone. He

seemed to be in the last stages of hypothermia. I couldn't estimate what his core temperature was, but it was darn low. I took his pulse and was pretty sure he was in shock already. I didn't time his pulse, but it was shallow. He was just barely conscious. He couldn't talk, and he was moaning a lot, but seemed to moan in response to his name. He had a little muscle control, and we managed to sit him up, and he could sort of cooperate a little bit."

The rescue party tried to feed Steven some tea. He swallowed just a few sips and then wouldn't swallow any more, so they gave up on that. They knew they had only two alternatives: to attempt to warm him there, which would have been very difficult, if not impossible, or to get him to the cabin as fast as they could. They chose the second course.

Wrapping Steven in the sleeping bag they took from his pack, they put him in the snow boat and started down the treacherous path.

Reidel tells the ending to the tragic story: "About 15 minutes from the cabin, we noticed that he had stopped breathing. I tried for his pulse again, and he didn't have one that I could discern. But it wasn't going to be any good stopping then, so we went as fast as we could for the cabin. When we got him to the cabin, he had no heartbeat at all." Steven Collier was dead.

TODAY, ARTHUR REIDEL is angry at the "idiots" he says are crowding the dwindling wilderness areas in the Northeast, too often unprepared for the rigors they must face.

"Half the people out

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ing trip and a five-hour morning climb for that brief observation.

The ridge the monkeys had crossed was in excess of 14,000 feet, the highest elevation where any primate has ever been observed. We realized that we must return another year to learn more about these langurs in the clouds. ▀

Death On A Mountain

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 there," he complains, think they are out for a walk in a city park. When they are in the Tetons, it is obvious to them that it may be dangerous. But the wilderness areas in the Adirondacks are not obvious mountaineering situations.

"The Collier death is the law of probability catching up with us. There are 30,000 hikers a year in the Adirondacks, and 27,000 of them don't know what they're doing." He believes that more novices will mean more accidents, and more accidents will result in the closing of wilderness areas to even experienced hikers.

Reidel is pessimistic about the possibility of reaching novice hikers enough to avert future tragedies. "All this stuff about telling people what is coming off is not going to prevent them from wiping themselves out. They brag about having been through a survival situation. There is not enough sense of responsibility. People go out and do things, knowing that someone will rescue them."

Nevertheless, he offers three pieces of advice that, if followed, can minimize the dangers for winter hikers:

"The single most important thing is to wear wool from head to foot, and nothing else. Some people claim they are allergic to wool, but almost anyone can wear some soft wool when it is cold. If you are wearing wool, you can do incredibly dumb things and not get hurt. If we could just get rid of the blue jeans, it would be a good step.

"Number two is to drink water and take a reasonable amount of salt. It's not obvious, but dehydration is a real problem in the winter. Three or four quarts of water a day is not excessive. Also, eat plenty of food—as much as 4,500 or 5,000 calories a day, even if you don't feel like it.

"The third thing is to use common

sense. Be alert for early stages of trouble. Trouble is easy to avoid but tough to get out of. And don't panic."

Wear wool. Eat and drink. Sounds easy, doesn't it? But because two people forgot, or never knew, Steven Collier is dead and Patrick Eagan will have to live with the memory of a tragic trip for the rest of his days. ▀

NOTE: reprints of Alan E. Nourse's article "Hypothermia and Frostbite," from BP-4, are available at 50 cents each (prepaid) from Backpacker Books, Bellows Falls, Vermont 05101.

Wilderness Skiing

Continued from page 63
 Care should be taken to ensure that boots, bindings and skis are well matched to each other.

In contrast to these relatively simple items, the "up-and-back-down" skiers rely on sophisticated high-performance equipment. This is Company 3's thing: manufacturing and marketing the most advanced gear for running the steep and deep. What the firm does not make itself, it finds in the most obscure places in the United States and Europe. For alpine touring equipment, four major challenges stand out: the equipment must perform well under extreme stress, it must be reasonably light, it must work together and, although its chief function is the downhill run, it should also follow the Nordic groove. No mean task. Surveying Company 3's array of basic gear, it might appear that Rube Goldberg had gone skiing. Not so. Today's madness is tomorrow's wisdom.

• *Skis.* Company 3's Trucker skis (Mother Trucker, Trucker 2 and plain ole Trucker) are designed to handle the loveliest and lousiest conditions of steep mountain slopes. The Trucker line evolved from the European *Kurzski*, a short backcountry mountain ski used by Swiss, Austrian and German army troops on duty in the Alps. Company 3 has progressively improved its product to the present models made of combined thermo-plastic, fiberglass, rubber, polyethylene and aluminum. Each element has a similar molecular structure so the ski is a very "tight unity." Chattering and vibration are minimal,