

MOUNTAIN BULLETIN

A PUBLICATION OF THE AMERICAN MOUNTAIN GUIDES ASSOCIATION

ED UPDATE

BY BETSY NOVAK

2008 was a year of change and progress for the American Mountain Guides Association. We enjoyed a 23% growth in membership in addition to the launch of two new and successful training programs. We maintained our partnerships with industry leaders and initiated a hopeful discussion with a highly regarded educational institution about an academic partnership that would approve AMGA courses for graduate and undergraduate credit.

Due to successful fundraising efforts the AMGA was able to provide over \$40,000 in scholarships and subsidies to our membership and thousands of dollars worth of technical product for exam graduates. The AMGA partnered with Outdoor Recreation Insurance to set in motion a personal accident insurance plan for all members, including spouses and kids, and their paying clients.



AMGA instructor/examiner Doug Nidever and Betsy enjoy a little ice in Ouray

The AMGA invested in the development and production of new marketing and promotional materials to better represent AMGA guides, climbing instructors and our credentialing programs, and distributed hundreds of copies at national conferences and events. Venturing to substantially improve our certification and accreditation program, we allocated significant funds and resources into program developments, instructor pool training, and public policy initiatives.

Looking ahead there is much work to be done. Access is one of the greatest concerns of our membership and as more guides enter the field; more climbers and skiers head to the hills; and more conflicting management plans are implemented, our responsibility to unify the guiding community and fulfill our mission of being the premier source for training, credentials and services for professional mountain guides and climbing instructors in the United States becomes paramount.

The AMGA is committed to investing the time, money, and passion necessary to advance the guid-

ing and climbing instructor profession. We will continue to expand our programs, policy work, and member benefits. We will continue to work with our partners to provide unique marketing opportunities for our guides and instructors. We will continue to build vital relationships with industry affiliates, land managers, university and outdoor schools, guide service owners, independent guides, and partner programs. We will continue to do this because we believe in what we do and we believe in the work you do for the profession as a whole. Please email me to let me know what you feel the AMGA should be working on in 2009.

Cheers to the New Year!



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PRESIDENTS CORNER
BY MARGARET WHEELER

JANUARY IS AN EXCELLENT TIME OF YEAR FOR US TO REVIEW THE EVENTS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF PAST YEAR, AND TO MAKE PLANS FOR 2009. In doing so, the first thing that stands out to me is the incredible amount of work and progress that the AMGA has accomplished in 2008. Betsy has highlighted many of these in her section of this newsletter; from membership to marketing, insurance to fundraising, and from building new programs to strengthening those that are already in place. Those few paragraphs are the tip of the iceberg, and I encourage all of you to take the time to learn more about what is happening with the AMGA: check out the website, visit the office, come to our board meetings, and join into the energy and momentum of our organization.

Many of the accomplishments of 2008 lead into goals for 2009, and our January board meeting creates the venue to focus on those goals; to build, update, and clarify them. In doing so, the subject of access is among those in the forefront of my mind. As we begin to formulate our plans going forward, it seems very important to highlight a few events from the past year.

In addition to all the incredible hard work of the office in 2008, we also saw the CGF come into existence, and, with the support of the AMGA board, begin to grow and mature in its focus on access for certified guides. This development is multi-layered, and ties into the very heart of some of our most complex tasks as an organization. Together with the work done by Ed Crothers on Accreditation, the tangible accomplishments of the CGF have brought to the forefront the connectedness of our organization. As the AMGA develops and our programs strengthen, we are coming to a position where we must focus on this idea of the connections – and the common goals - of all of our members.

As you work through the busy winter season, I urge all of you to consider the ways in which your goals, and your needs, align – or don't align - with the work of the AMGA.

This connectedness is apparent in outreach – we held our first Regional Round Table discussion on access in Bend, OR at the annual meeting, including certified guides, guide services, members of the Board, and members of the CGF. The focus was to create a forum for communication and cooperation, so we can all work together in access issues as they arise. One of the outcomes of this round table was a realization by all of us that we are more connected than perhaps we expected.

The idea of connectedness is also very present in the international guiding community - in late November of last year, I had the honor to represent the AMGA at the IFMGA meeting in Stockholm. In addition to meeting all the amazing guides in the organization (have you ever seen a gold pin?), my task was to update the room – full of guides from 20 countries – about the developments and challenges of access in the US, and about the plans for the IFMGA meeting in Boulder in 2010. The response – given in three languages – was one of enthusiasm and encouragement.

The sum of these two experiences – the round table and the IFMGA meeting – has been my reminder of the importance of working together as we move forward. As you work through the busy winter season, I urge all of you to consider the ways in which your goals, and your needs, align – or don't align - with the work of the AMGA. Are we on the same page? How can we get there? What are we missing? And when you have some answers or ideas, drop us a line and let us know what you think, or join an event or an AMGA function to get an update of all that is taking place with your organization.



Katie Kelly is the AMGA Membership Director.

Betsy Novak is the AMGA Executive Director.

Henry Beyer is the AMGA Program Director and a Certified Single Pitch Instructor.

Ed Crothers is the AMGA Accreditation Director.

Margaret Wheeler is President of the AMGA, an IFMGA Guide and an instructor for the AMGA.

Rob Hess serves as the Technical Director of the AMGA. He is IFMGA certified and is the senior guide/owner of Jackson Hole Mountain Guides.

Bruce Edgerly is the Vice President and co-founder of Backcountry Access.

Don Pachner is the President of Pachner & Associates, LLC.

Mike Alkaitis is a Certified Rock Guide & General Manager of Total Climbing in Boulder, Co.

Evan Stevens is an IFMGA Guide, climber and skier, always on the go for good rock and great snow.

NEWSLETTER DEADLINE

The Mountain Bulletin is Published in February, May, August, November. The next issue of the Mountain Bulletin will be published February 13, 2009.

Deadlines for all submissions in 2009, including advertising are: January 9th(winter issue) April 10th (spring issue) July 10th(summer issue) October 9th(fall issue)

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READ THIS DISCLAIMER!

The AMGA, its officers and employees, authors, editors, artists and volunteers assume no responsibility or liability for accuracy, effectiveness, or safety of any technique or advice described in this publication. It is the responsibility of the individual climber or guide to investigate technical techniques and evaluate them for safety and applicability.

INDEPENDENT CONTRACTORS AND THE NEW USFS DIRECTIVES

BY ED CROTHERS, AMGA ACCREDITATION DIRECTOR

AT THE ANNUAL MEETING IN BEND THERE WAS A LOT OF TALK REGARDING THE NEW DIRECTIVES ISSUED IN SEPTEMBER, 2008 BY THE U.S. FOREST SERVICE THAT DIRECTLY AFFECTS PERMIT HOLDERS ON FOREST SERVICE LANDS. ONE SPECIFIC TOPIC THAT GOT A LOT OF ATTENTION WAS THE NEW POLICY PERTAINING TO THE USE OF INDEPENDENT CONTRACTORS BY PERMIT HOLDERS. Based on what I heard, I was left with the impression that the new directives were cut and dry, banning the use of independent contractors/subcontractors. Having concerns as to how this could affect the Certified Guides Federation and AMGA Accredited Programs, I decided to take a closer look.

On-line I was able to review the USFS "Special Uses Handbook" that contains these new directives. Also, in the Federal Register, I found responses from the USFS to public comments submitted during the scoping process. What I discovered is that both documents appeared to reveal a significant grey area and present a much "softer" interpretation of the directive than I had anticipated. To get clarification on this issue I contacted Carolyn Holbrook, USFS Recreation, Heritage and Volunteer Resources Director in Washington D.C. and Mike Heilman of the Portland, OR USFS Regional Office. Both of these people were very involved in the writing of these directives. Carolyn and Mike made it very clear that the new directives do not ban the use of independent contractors

by permit holders. They pointed out that using subcontractors is acceptable provided the following conditions are met:

-The permit holder is the agent and is therefore responsible for the actions of employees and/or contractors.

-All employees and contractors must provide proof of liability insurance that names the USFS as additionally insured. If a permit holder's in-

through independent contractors.

-Subcontractors must be listed on the permit.

If you hold permits on USFS lands and, either use independent contractors, are considering using them or you provide services as one, I would encourage you to look at "Forest Service Special Use Handbook FSH 2709.11," specifically Chapter 40 - Special Use Administration to see

If you hold permits on USFS lands and, either use independent contractors, are considering using them or you provide services as one, I would encourage you to look at "Forest Service Special Use Handbook FSH 2709.11," specifically Chapter 40.

surance does not provide coverage for contractors, the contractors must provide proof of their own liability insurance that must be submitted to and approved by the local district office well in advance of the trip.

-Permit holders cannot not be "shell companies" that only book clients and provide all services

how these changes might affect your business. It will take time for this information to trickle down to every USFS Ranger District and is likely to be subject to different interpretations in different regions. Being familiar with this information could prove beneficial when negotiating with your local Ranger District.



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TD CORNER

BY ROB HESS



In my last newsletter I briefly discussed a number of topics, one of which was the minimum standards for movement skills in the three disciplines at the AMGA. By the time this newsletter comes out, we will have run 2-3 ski guides courses. My goal in writing this newsletter is to help individuals considering entering in the ski guide program to better understand the level of skiing they will be assessed at and held to at the AMGA. The ski discipline is unique in many ways. In thinking about the skills of the clients we work with, they may vary greatly from the other disciplines. In most cases, the clients a guide works with in the rock and alpine disciplines will have movement skills that are considerably less developed than those of the guide. In the ski discipline, it is not uncommon to be guiding retired extreme ski racers, top level ski film athletes and other forms of highly developed ski athletes. It would not be a stretch to say that in these cases, the clients are better skiers than the guides. We know that there is much more to the various aspects of ski guiding than

just skiing ability, but the ski guide must ski at a level that commands respect in all levels of skiers. The members of the AMGA Ski Discipline Instructor Pool have spent considerable time discussing and developing the expectations and process of assessing skills of student skiers. Bela Vadasz, the discipline coordinator for the ski program, drafted the technical descriptions for all AMGA ski guides. Bela states, "An AMGA Ski Mountaineering Guide must be skiing at a standard that is inspirational and motivational to all Advanced Zone skiers".

Too often I observe individuals rushing the process and in the end perform below the standard thus forced to retake programs. I ask folks to consider carefully as to whether they are at the standard.

AMGA Ski Mountaineering Guides must demonstrate an appropriate mastery of the blending of skills for the following maneuvers: Wedge Turns, Wedge Christies, Stem Christies, Parallel Turns, Hop Turns, Pedal-hop Turns, Dynamic Parallel Turns

A prospective ski guide must be at or very close to the standard described in the technical description. If they are not, they may be asked to drop out of the course. Too often I observe individuals rushing the process and in the end perform below the standard thus forced to retake programs. I ask folks to consider carefully as to whether they are at the standard. If you are a free-heel skier, you will be asked to perform alpine skiing techniques. Snow boarders must have intimate knowledge of skiing techniques and capable of coaching skiing. Individuals, who snowboard and are seeking IFMGA certification, will be required to demonstrate skiing proficiency. If you have any doubts, do not understand the technical descriptions or wonder if you are at the standard, get an IP member to give you a pre-assessment... but please remember that we take this very seriously. Below is the technical description for the skiing standard as authored by Bela.

To meet the AMGA Ski Mountaineering Guide Standard, a candidate must demonstrate the following level of skiing skills:

- Ski with a centered, efficient stance with appropriate ankle and knee flexion along with the ability to move center of mass fore/aft and laterally to maintain dynamic balance in all situations and snow conditions.
- Begin each turn by noticeably moving the center of mass in the direction of the new turn.
- Generate turning power from the feet and lower legs rather than from the upper body.
- Upper/lower body separation with a countered relationship to create anticipation of a new turn along with precise pole plant timing and usage in all situations.
- A continuum of skills blending from wedge and stem turns to dynamic, high speed, carved parallel turns with high edge angles and center of mass well inside the turn.
- Controlled skiing in any situation including very steep (up to 50°) narrow chutes with the ability to bring any turn to a stop if necessary.
- Rhythm and flow in turn-to-turn skiing with a guide's pack or multi-day pack.

I hope this article clarifies the requirements for AMGA Ski Programs. Stay well and have a safe and productive winter season.



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DIGGING DEEPER: UNCOVERING THE REAL ISSUES IN NORTH AMERICAN MULTIPLE BURIALS

BY BRUCE EDGERLY

People are people. They are not numbers. To find out what the real issues are in avalanche rescues, we must go beyond statistics and speak directly to the select group of people who have actually had an avalanche transceiver in their hands during real, live avalanche rescues. This is what we have done in part two of our ongoing research on multiple burials. Our findings: in real multiple burial situations, it's not about beacon searching; it's about shoveling. This is what avalanche educators should be teaching in their courses, along with organization, basic beacon searching, probing, avalanche escape strategies and airbag use.

Part one of our research included statistical studies in North America and Tyrol, Austria by Bruce Edgerly and Dieter Stopper, respectively, who shared the services of consulting computer scientist, Jon Mullen. Both of these studies were published last season in *The Avalanche Review*, independently concluding that "special case" close-proximity multiple burials are extremely rare—and often overstated by beacon manufacturers. Since then, several other reports have been published, including a study by French avalanche researcher Frédéric Jarry. He cites Swiss researcher Manuel Genswein's suggestion that at least two shovelers are recommended per buried victim for that person to stand a chance at survival. But according to Jarry, very few recreational groups have that kind of manpower. In the absence of shoveling manpower, he argues, then advanced techniques (and technology) for complicated multiple burials are a distraction from the real issue: shoveling. Sooner or later, Jarry concludes, it's necessary to start digging!

No matter where the statistics come from—researchers or beacon manufacturers, North America or Europe—they're still only statistics. They are not capable of telling the real story. An avalanche debris pile is not the place for creative statistics and "ivory tower" thinking. It is a place for grim reality. Every avalanche incident is as unique as the people involved. This is why in part two of our research we have chosen to "dig deeper" and speak to those individuals who have actually performed a multiple-victim transceiver search in the field.

For the victim to have a reasonable chance of



survival, there should be at least two shovelers for each buried victim. Most recreational groups don't have that kind of manpower, according to Jarry. (Photo by Bruce Edgerly.)

STATISTICAL REVIEW

According to the American Avalanche Association incidents database (HYPERLINK "<http://www.avalanche.org>"), from 1995 through April 2008, just 14 percent (45 incidents) of roughly 300 complete burial incidents involved multiple victims. Of these 297 confirmed complete burial incidents, just 5 percent (15 incidents) involved multiple-victim beacon searches.



Of these same 297 incidents, just 1.7 percent (5 incidents) involved close-proximity multiple burials, where a special technique (or technology) could have been applied. Normally, a multiple burial can be solved with common sense, by searching for the victims "in series" or "in parallel," using the same techniques that are used in single burials. Only in "special case" multiple burials would a special technique or technology come into play. These involve cases where two or more completely buried victims are within roughly 10 meters of each other (close enough so their signals are hard to differentiate)—and where there is adequate manpower so some rescuers can start digging while the best searcher continues with the beacon search.

These low percentages are a significant departure from a 2002 Swiss study which asserted that 60 percent of avalanche victims were involved in multiple burials. They also strongly contradict a recent printed statement from a German beacon manufacturer that "about 50 percent of all reported avalanche accidents involve two or more persons with interfering signals."

In most cases, the technique for a multiple-victim transceiver search is the same technique that is used for a single victim search. By moving systematically through the debris, a digital transceiver will isolate each signal as the searcher gets closer. Only in special cases involving close-proximity burials—and adequate manpower—should this technique change. (Photo by Simon Fryer.)



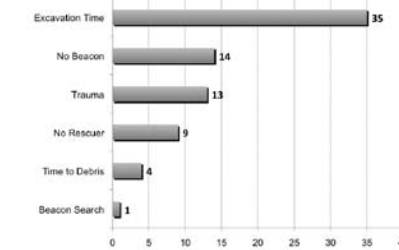
DIGGING DEEPER: RESCUER INTERVIEWS

We began "digging deeper" by contacting members of the 15 parties in which multiple-victim beacon searches were actually performed. In addition, we contacted members of parties in which at least two people were reported killed from 1995 to 2008 on www.avalanche.org. The objective was to make sure these were captured in our research and to get "worst case" feedback from the field. This added up to roughly 35 incidents that we investigated through interviews with actual rescuers, coroners, search-and-rescue teams, and/or other witnesses.

To get a big-picture view of the entire rescue process, we asked the following questions to each person that we contacted:

- How many victims were completely buried with no surface clues?
- How deep were they buried?
- How far apart were they buried?
- Did you perform signal triage to prioritize those victims most likely to survive?
- Did the victim(s) die from asphyxia, trauma, or some other means?
- Was there a last-seen-area?
- Did you perform a primary/signal search?
- Was there any confusion from interfering beacon signals?
- What beacon search techniques were used: searching in series, searching in parallel, micro search strips, the Three-Circle Method, Special mode, "marking?"
- Did you turn off the victim's beacon after pinpointing him/her?

- What technique was used for excavating the victims?
- How much time was spent searching versus



shoveling?

- What was the most time-consuming part of the rescue?

In conjunction with these lengthy—and often emotional—conversations, we defined the primary cause of each fatality in each multiple burial incident, with the help of the witnesses and/or respective coroner. These results are summarized in the bar graph below:

Multiple Burial Fatalities (total deaths: 76)

In 76 multiple-burial fatalities, excavation time was cited 35 times as the primary issue. This was followed by no beacon (14) and trauma (13), respectively. There was only one case in which a confusing beacon search was cited as a problem. And in this case, the rescuer said it was mainly the depth of burial, not multiple signals, that caused the confusion.

ADDITIONAL FINDINGS

• Close-proximity multiple burials were extremely rare. They included the case above from Kocanee Glacier, B.C. in 2003; the well-publicized incidents at Durrand Glacier and Connaught Creek, B.C., also in 2003; a highmarking incident near Fernie, B.C. several years ago and another snowmobiling incident near Afton, Wyoming in January 2008 (in this case, there were no survivors to perform a companion rescue). Confusing signals were cited as a problem only in the incident at Kocanee Glacier.

• Burial depth and lack of shoveling manpower are the main contributors to excessive excavation time. Non-releasable bindings can increase the depth of burial and also hinder the rescuer's ability to extricate and treat the victim. In at least one case, an avalanche airbag was used and was effective in preventing burial depth.

• While rare, multiple burials are best avoided, as they almost always result in fatalities. In only 1 of 45 multiple-burial cases did all the com-

pletely buried victims survive. In this 2004 incident, numerous rescuers were available to excavate the two victims, who were highmarking in a popular snowmobiling area near Lake Ann, Washington. The best options for maintaining shoveling manpower are appropriate group size, proper terrain selection, skilled routefinding, and exposing as few people as possible to the avalanche hazard.

It's possible that other successful live recoveries have occurred. The database at [HYPERLINK "http://www.avalanche.org"](http://www.avalanche.org) www.avalanche.org is mainly limited to fatalities; live recoveries often go unreported.

• In several cases (including Lake Ann), rescuers said they had a problem with errant signals coming from other rescuers. While it can be extremely helpful to have multiple searchers on the scene, this can complicate the beacon search if there is a lack of site control.

• Of all the complete burial incidents, just over half of the victims were wearing beacons. This was higher in Canada (79 percent) than in the U.S. (43 percent). This difference is partially explained by the prevalence of commercial guiding in Canada compared to the U.S. Canadian guided groups comprised a relatively high percentage of the multiple burial incidents. In commercial groups, all participants are required to use transceivers.

• Transceiver use is on the rise. From the periods 1998-2002 to 2003-2008, beacon use rose from 52 percent to 57 percent of the victims.

• Snowmobile avalanche incidents comprise roughly 40 percent of overall avalanche incidents. This percentage did not change significantly from 1998-2002 to 2003-2008.

• Transceivers are slightly less accepted by snowmobilers than by non-motorized users. Just 44 percent of the snowmobiling victims were wearing beacons, while 55 percent of the non-motorized victims were wearing them.

• The concept of a "primary search" was irrelevant. In almost all cases, there was a last-seen-area or the rescuers had a clear idea of where to begin the beacon search. In four cases, excessive time was spent traveling before a signal was acquired. This was attributed to difficult footing or an effort to avoid secondary avalanche hazards ("hangfire"), not to the lack of a signal.

• Keep your gloves on! In several cases, the excavation process was compromised by non-functional hands after the rescuer took off his or her

gloves to assemble gear, then lost them.

CONCLUSION

To understand the real issues in multiple burials, statistics are just a starting point. By interviewing the rescuers who have actually performed multiple-victim beacon searches on the snow, we see a clearer picture of what matters: excavation time and carrying beacons. For avalanche educators that are teaching courses to recreationists, time is limited. To best serve their students, educators should emphasize the following:

1. Organizing the rescue: Allocating manpower, controlling the site, and calling for assistance when appropriate.

2. Basic beacon searching: Owning beacons, mastering single burials, and—in more advanced groups—double burials performed in series or in parallel. Instruction on "special case" close-proximity techniques should be limited to professional courses.

3. Shoveling techniques: Several recently published reports propose valuable techniques for efficiently excavating avalanche victims, including "strategic shoveling" and the "V-shaped conveyor" method (see References, below).

4. Probing: Basic probing for life-sized targets, not Tupperware, using a spiral or concentric circle pattern.

5. Reducing the depth of burial: This can be accomplished through proactive escape strategies, releasable bindings, and avalanche airbag technology.

Most important, however, is preventing avalanche incidents in the first place—through on-snow education, terrain selection, proper routefinding, and effective communication. Ideally, educators shouldn't need to teach avalanche rescue in their courses at all. But this, of course, is more "ivory tower" thinking—and there's no place for that on the debris pile!

Grim reality. On the avalanche debris pile, it's about shoveling, not beacon searching. (Photo courtesy Flathead County Coroner.)



GEAR REVIEW

BY HENRY BEYER
ED CROTHERS
MIKE ALKAITIS
EVAN STEVENS

Fission SL Jacket



Arc'teryx Fission SL Jacket

By Henry Beyer
The Fission SL is the lightest, fully waterproof, insulated jacket offered by Arc'teryx. New for 2009 and featuring Gore-tex ProShell and Thermatek non-quilted insulation, the Fission SL should, not surprisingly, soon become the favorite jacket for all kinds of outdoor enthusiasts. I have predominantly worn it down hill skiing, but it's light weight and Gore-tex shell make it a perfect outer layer for cold weather sports. With an insulated hood that easily fits over a ski helmet you can add just that little bit of extra warmth you need while belaying, or removing skins, or for when the wind picks up. Plus if you feel like you are getting too warm ample armpit zips allow you to quickly control your temperature as well. This is a jacket designed for active, cold weather activities and so far it has not disappointed.

Arc'teryx Kappa AR Pant

By Henry Beyer
Kappa AR Pants are in a word-warm. Weighing slightly under a buck and a half these pants offer a big bang for that buck and half. The outer shell is fashioned from Windstopper material and they are insulated with Primaloft Sport insulation. You can easily dump them in the bottom of your pack and pull them out for those cold ice climbing belays (made easy with full separating side zippers) or for slipping them on at night during a multi-day ski tour. Or if ice and snow are not your thing, the Kappa AR make great camp pants for those cold autumn nights in the desert. With reinforced knees and seat, you won't be afraid of trashing them while telling stories around the campfire. As for me I just like being warm.



Kappa AR Pant

Arc'teryx Gamma SV Pant

By Henry Beyer
I have to say that I love these pants. They are constructed from Polartec Power Shield fabric and are both wind and moisture proof. They can be worn as an outer or inner layer equally well. While climbing the Gamma SV work great as an outer layer but if the wind picks up or the precipitation gets too heavy, they are trim enough to easily fit under an outer shell. In fact they are so trim that you might want to consider upsizing if you prefer a more "roomy" fit. I like them under my ski pants at the area because they keep my legs warmer while riding the lift, but they do come with a stretch cuff with lace hook and adjustable static cord thus supplanting the need for a gaiter if you choose to wear them on the outside of your boot. A particularly nice feature are the two mid thigh cargo pockets where you can easily stow a beanie or carry an on the climb snack. These highly versatile pants get two thumbs up.



Gamma SV Pant

Atlas BC 24 Snowshoes

By Ed Crothers
The BC 24 is the Atlas snowshoe targeted toward backcountry users, in particular ice climbers, mountaineers and snowboarders. To meet the needs of those users, the BS 24 was made shorter than other Atlas snowshoes and a bit wider to provide good floatation while cutting down the weight.

I used these snowshoes in fresh powder, on hard wind crust and on early season approaches when a good deal of travel involved moving over rocks barely covered by snow. Overall, I liked this snowshoe. While it is 1 pound heavier than the plastic snowshoes I have used over the years, the extra weight was hardly noticeable. The binding system is simple and user friendly. The three binding straps held my feet securely preventing sideways rotation even when traversing moderately steep wind crust and the straps are easy to use with heavy gloves on.

There are a few changes I would like to see. In our line of work, it is critical that we use equipment that can be easily serviced in the field. On this model, attachment points for binding straps and buckles are rivets. I'd like to see these rivets replaced by nuts and bolts making replacement much easier. While I found the Spring Loaded Suspension (SLS) to work well, the straps holding the bindings in place wrap around the outside and bottom of the aluminum frame making them susceptible to abrasion. My suggestion would be to drop the fancy suspension system and go with a simpler design. I'd like to see the crampons that run parallel to the frame be longer to provide better traction for traversing hard packed slopes.

Despite these suggested changes, the BC 24 is a well-made and durable product that is best suited for travel over snow covered, but not mixed, terrain. It would be a very good choice for an extended trip to Denali or other snowy peaks.



BC 24

Professional Snow Data Field Book - Hacksaw Publishing - See pg.14

By Evan Stevens
There are two types of people who take notes out in the field, ones who are organized and know what essential notes they take, and those who need their hands held when their noses are in the snow. The Hacksaw Ski Book is the perfect field notebook for the second set of snow geeks. Personally, I found it a great book to start out my season with, loaded with reminders of all the SWAG standard tests and recording guidelines - no need for cheat sheets! It is a great book for the guide in training, especially as they are charging through their AIARE courses and prepping for SGC's and SGM's. Even if you are a pure 'snow professional', i.e. avalanche forecaster, patroller, or backcountry observer, the pages in the book are going to be great for documenting your professional quality pits.

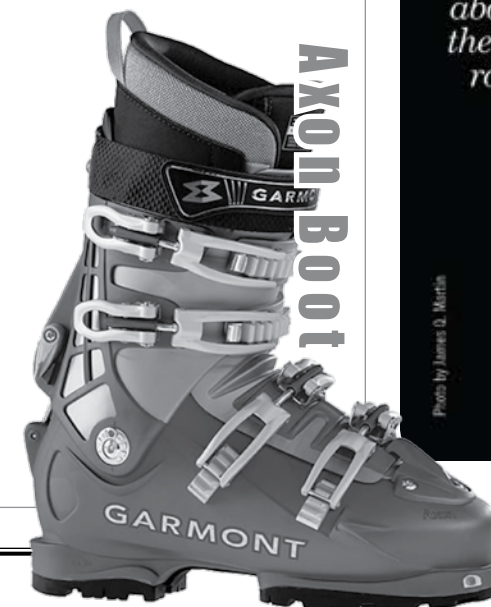
Remember though, this is strictly a snow obs book, no room for tour plans or random scribbles, don't forget your standard blank notebook!

Garmont Axon Boot Review

By Mike Alkaitis
It is amazing to sit down and write about a boot I have become so fond of over the last year. The Axon was Garmont's new addition to the beefy freeride line and is Dynafit compatible. The big boot skied with precision and feel, while the uphill was smooth and easy with the Dynafit bindings. The Axon is a bit heavy at 9lbs a pair, but the comfort, durability, and stiffness all make up for the weight.

One of the best features of the boot is the durability. I skied on the boot over 40 days last winter and spring and the shell and sole have stood the test of time. From short trips up and down the Dragon Tail Couloire in Rocky Mountain National Park to the longer spring tours on Drift Peak these boots always seemed to be the perfect model for me.

The liner is greatly improved over the prior year and fills the boot out nicely. Remember to get the liner professionally formed for a great fit and lasting comfort. Overall, the Garmont Axon is a great AT boot.



AXON Boot



"If the truth were known about climbing rubber, there would be only one rock shoe company."

- Ivo Ninov

Photos by James O. Murtha



PROGRAM DIRECTOR UPDATE

By HENRY BEYERS

AS WE MOVE INTO 2009 AND, MORE IMPORTANTLY, AS THE AMGA CONTINUES TO GROW ITS PRESENCE AND ITS INFLUENCE WITHIN THE GUIDING COMMUNITY, IT IS IMPORTANT AS MEMBERS OF A PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATION THAT WE REMEMBER TO STRIVE TO CONDUCT OURSELVES PROFESSIONALLY AT ALL TIMES. Item seven of the AMGA Code of Ethics begins with, "At all times, we are representatives of the AMGA and should conduct ourselves in a manner that reflects well on the AMGA. This applies not only on AMGA courses, but anytime we are interacting with clients, the public, or others including government agencies."

Professionalism, or conducting oneself professionally, is fundamental to all AMGA programs and its mission. So much so that, as most of you already know, Professionalism is one of nine assessment categories aspiring guides must pass before

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becoming AMGA certified. It also serves as an important distinction between those who belong to a professional organization and those who don't—that is there is a conscious decision and commitment to conduct oneself and one's business in a professional manner when an individual joins a professional organization.



Gor-tex represents the AMGA in style at the 2009 Ouray Ice Fest

Much of the AMGA's success comes from how others perceive us. The more positive the impact we as members have on clients, the public, unaffiliated guides, and government agencies the easier it is for the AMGA to grow and to ultimately impact the guiding industry as a whole. On the other hand, if we are viewed as elitist, or as holier than thou, or as just plain inconsiderate we risk alienating those we most want to influence positively and consequently we risk becoming ineffective in our mission to raise public awareness, thus losing the ability to influence decisions concerning public land use issues, credential based access, and more. This is not to say that we cannot uphold a higher standard, on the contrary as a professional organization we must. However we must do so with humility and with respect.

Unfortunately, it often takes just a moment, one unthoughtful act to undo years of hard work and progress. Thus, my fellow AMGA members, my challenge to you for this year and beyond, is to conduct ourselves in a manner that upholds the highest standards of the AMGA and brings credit upon ourselves and our organization.

Thanks for listening.

THE FIRST QUESTION GUIDES ALWAYS ASK IS THE PRICE OF INSURANCE AND I HAVE SOME GOOD NEWS TO REPORT. INSURANCE RATES HAVE BEEN FALLING FOR THE PAST 2 YEARS. They are not likely going to increase in the next 6 months, despite the financial crisis that has impacted insurance company investments.

The market is still competitive, and AMGA certifications earned by your guides in the past year can result in up to a 5% or 10% additional credit on your renewal insurance rate. An AMGA certification and accreditation is highly respected by insurance underwriters, and this is reflected in the insurance rates..

When guiding, you wouldn't venture out with a client without first inspecting your equipment and taking inventory to make sure you have the equipment required for the climb. The same holds true for your insurance policy. One of the most common questions we are asked by guide services is whether the owners, guides or 1099 guides are covered by their Commercial General Liability Policy.

Make sure that the name on the policy is the exact legal name of your guide service and includes any additional names you operate under, including any subsidiaries or affiliated entities involved in guiding & outfitting, mountaineering instruction, movie production, etc. The insurance company will deny any liability and decline a claim for an entity or DBA not listed on the policy.

Insurance underwriters may add coverage for a wholly owned entity with similar operations at no or minimal additional charge, depending on the increase in gross receipts or user days. For this reason, it is important to let your insurance broker or agent know all legal entities or names to be insured on the policy at inception, and to add them during the policy year should you create any entities after the effective date of the policy.

Most Commercial General Liability policies covering mountaineering guides & outfitters automatically include coverage for a number of "insureds" whom are named in the "who is insured" section of the insurance policy.

The "insureds" defined in your insurance policy include the sole proprietor, directors and officers, staff and volunteers (although some older policy forms do not cover volunteers) in the event they are named in a claim or lawsuit. The insurance company often considers guides temporarily employed on a 1099, if they are

under the direction and control of the guide service as insured employees, particularly if they use your equipment. When listing them on your guide roster sent to insurance underwriters, make sure you show their professional AMGA certifications.

If coverage has been included for additional insureds (government agencies, landowners, landlords, booking agents, concession agreements, etc.) they are afforded coverage under your policy also.

All these insured entities share the policy limits for any one claim, so each time you add an insured you are diluting the policy limit if they are all named in a single claim.

Professional errors & omissions liability (malpractice) coverage for guides involved in instruction covers claims arising out of errors in

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instruction or certification. This type of claim is excluded by all Commercial General Liability Policies.

For example, your guide service trains and certifies a climber or another guide, and that climber or guide is later involved in an incident involving bodily injury. The claimant alleges it was caused by faulty instruction or an error in certifying an unqualified guide. These types of claims would be denied by your Commercial General Liability insurer, but covered under Professional Errors & Omissions Liability (sometimes called Malpractice) policy.

Claims Made Coverage is an important feature of most Errors & Omissions Liability Policies, as well as at least one Commercial General Liability Policy form. This is perhaps the most misunderstood concept we have encountered in the guiding community, and one that anyone running a guide service should understand.

Many professional errors & omissions liability policies include a retroactive date to the first day of continuous coverage at no additional cost. An extended reporting period on these types of policies is usually not necessary unless coverage is cancelled by the guide service.

On a Commercial General Liability policy which is "claims made", claims that are not brought by a claimant prior to expiration of

the policy would NOT be covered if reported to the insurance company after the policy expires, unless an extended reporting period is purchased at policy expiration.

Due to the cost involved, guide services rarely pay for this necessary extended reporting period on their Commercial General Liability policy.

For example, with "claims made" coverage, a client suffers what your guide considers a minor injury and you do not report it to your insurance carrier. Your "claims made" policy expires the next month and you do not purchase an extended reporting period.

The client later claims your guide was negligent and responsible for the injury, and brings a claim 3 months later after a difficult recovery. Your claim would not be covered by the

insurance. If a permit holder is named in the claim, it could imperil your permit.

One corollary of the claims reporting question: report all potential claims to the insurer to avoid prejudicing coverage in the future, whether you have a "claims made" or "occurrence" policy. This is not always easy and frequently a judgment calls. Guide services are disinclined to report every ankle sprain or strain, or even broken bones.

A potential claim can always be reported as an "occurrence only" without affecting your insurance premium, as long as the insurance company does not have to investigate it.

If your deductible includes loss adjustment expense, however (your broker or agent should be able to tell you whether it does) then you would have to pay up to the amount of the deductible for the costs of investigation, claims adjustment or legal expense for each claim brought as a result of an incident.

Adherence to the risk management procedures taught in AMGA courses will help minimize the potential for liability. At the same time, guides must be aware of the reporting provisions of their insurance contract and provide details of potential claims to their insurance agent or broker.

CERTIFICATION & ACCREDITATION

BY ED CROTHERS



AT THE ANNUAL MEETING IN BEND A HOT TOPIC OF DISCUSSION AT THE BOARD MEETING AND AMONG VARIOUS INDIVIDUALS DEALT WITH THE ISSUE OF AN ACCREDITATION PROGRAM AND CERTIFICATION PROGRAM EXISTING WITHIN THE SAME PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION. One side of the argument was that accreditation is an inexpensive way for a guide service or climbing program to gain access to the use of the AMGA "brand" while being held to a much lower standard than certified guides. As a result, it was argued that these programs had an unfair advantage over certified guides in the marketplace and accreditation devalued the certification process. On the other side, it was argued that accreditation meets a long standing goal of the AMGA to unite all working guides in the United States by providing access to the AMGA through many of the largest employers of guides in this country. Both sides raised good, valid points.

One area where common ground was found was that all membership would be better served by bringing certification and accreditation into closer alignment. It was pointed out that under the current accreditation standards, an AMGA Accredited Program was not required to have a single AMGA Certified Guide on staff. The standard is that "Lead Guides" must be either AMGA certified for the terrain they guide on or be able to document extensive experience. Also, an AMGA Accredited Program must provide two days of staff training for all the terrain categories operated on and that an AMGA guide certified in the appropriate terrain categories must conduct this training. For example, a program that offers multi-pitch rock climbing has to provide two days of multi-pitch rock training annually and that this training is provided by an AMGA Certified Rock Instructor or AMGA Certified Rock Guide. Staff exempt from this training requirement would be AMGA Certified Rock Instructors and Rock Guides.

When the accreditation standards were revised several years ago, the majority of the members of the Board of Directors felt there were not enough AMGA Certified Guides in the U.S. to set a higher standard for AMGA Accredited Programs. However at the November meeting, the consensus opinion was that the increased number of certified guides within the rock and alpine disciplines warranted a revision of these standards. To that end there are a couple initiatives underway.

Properly managed both can strengthen the AMGA by expanding membership while maintaining high educational testing, and business standards.

The first involved a rewrite of the Accreditation Educational and Terrain Standards that requires a "Lead Guide" for five of the seven Terrain Categories be AMGA Certified for the terrain they guide on. Ski Guide and Ski Mountaineering Guide are exempted from this requirement. The reasoning for this is the limited number of AMGA Certified Guides in the ski discipline at this time. It is expected that within the next three years those numbers will increase to the point that this exemption will be lifted. This proposal was submitted to the BOD at the January Board meeting and this revised standard could be in place as early as this summer.

The other project is tied to the long term goal of the AMGA to one day have all guides in the U.S. certified for the terrain they guide on or actively pursuing certification. The Accreditation Committee is looking at how the Accreditation Program can help in the pursuit of this goal. To accomplish this a survey is being put together by the committee to gather information from current accredited programs. Among other things, this information will be used to help develop a long-range strategy for tying certification and accreditation together.

As Accreditation Director it is my opinion that certification and accreditation do not have to be mutually exclusive. Both programs provide very different services. Properly managed both can strengthen the AMGA by expanding membership while maintaining high educational, testing, and business standards. Resolving the long-standing issue to everyone's satisfaction is an unrealistic goal. However, the November meeting has once again brought this issue forward and the Accreditation Committee and Board of Directors are responding. Should be an interesting year. Stay tuned.

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CONGRATULATIONS ELI POTTER, WINNER OF THE 2009 CHAD VANDERHAM SCHOLARSHIP!

TO THE NIIICE FUND BOARD & THE AMGA
- from Eli Potter

It is with great honor and elation that I receive your choice as the recipient of the Chad Vanderham Memorial Scholarship. Immediately upon learning of the scholarship, I had it in my mind to put forth the effort to try and win the award. Thanks to a lousy snow year and bad stability in Canada this winter, I was able to devote a little more time than I might have otherwise. In fact when I submitted the video it was -46 C in Banff that day. Now I am back home in AK actively preparing for the AMGA course and the next chapter in my guiding career. I can't thank you enough for the added impetus your financial support gives to that effort. I was also surprised and really stoked to find out about the Coombsy ski bonus. I am a big fan of those and know Coombsy would be psyched on where I will take them in the Chugach this spring. Man I sure do miss that guy. I never knew Chad but certainly knew of him through the Valdez-La Grave connections. Thanks again and may the rest of the winter bring you all good ski lines, great partnerships and safe days!!

The AMGA would like to congratulate this year's recipient of the Chad Vanderham Scholarship – Eli Potter. The Nice Fund Board and the AMGA wish you the best of luck in all your guiding pursuits. Eli's video can be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wKkGIlpme-s>

A NEW SCHOLARSHIP IN 2009 – LOR FOUNDATION!!!!

The AMGA is proud to announce that thanks to the kind support of the LOR Foundation we are able to offer an additional scholarship in any discipline for 2009! The AMGA would like to extend a huge thank you to the LOR Foundation for its' recent support of our organization. Without the invaluable support of our benefactors the AMGA would not be able to provide the over \$40,000 annually in scholarships and subsidies to our members. Thanks to our patrons the AMGA is capable of fulfilling its' mission of being the premier source of training, credentials and services for professional mountain guides and climbing instructors in the United States.

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