

The Safety Site
Monica Palmer, Safety Administrator
Recreational Safety takes Responsibility & Control

The following story was written by Kats Cannell for the 2024 Safety Story Contest. Thank you, Kats, for sharing your story with our fellow club members.

Tree well experience, by Kats Cannell

A few years ago, I was skiing at Jackson Hole with my buddy Robb Turner. There was some recent snow so we had lots of fairly fresh powder, tree skiing, and crud skiing. We were not skiing anything difficult or steep, just in an open area with some trees. Tree skiing is one of my favorite skiing so I was Loving it going thru light crud conditions between trees, something I do regularly.

At one point, I was going across on a narrow trail and turned left next to a tree when I caught an edge and twisted into the Tree Well. Fortunately, I went into the well Feet first and I didn't think anything about it figuring I would get right out and back on my feet to continue.

To my surprise, I had great difficulty getting out of the Tree Well. The snow was very light and I was unable to get a footing to push myself up and out. The fact that I had my skis on limited my ability to maneuver around or push myself up and out. I managed to get one ski off, but that did not help much since I was not able to push on anything with my boots to push myself up. With one ski off, I was somewhat able to maneuver the other ski so get "some" traction to push up slightly. It was a long process to inch up and slightly sideways to get out of the well.

A couple of people skied by and asked if I needed help, but my ego wouldn't let me ask for help since I was making some progress, he, he!! Eventually I got myself out and was back on my way.

So, after about 20 minutes, I met up with Robb, who was patiently waiting for me around the corner wondering if I hit a tree or was dead or something ... yes, I took some kidding from him on that trip!!

The learning from all this ... Tree Wells are Serious Business and I can imagine if I had fallen in Head First and buried, who knows if a different result could have happened!!! I have NEW respect for Tree Wells, and can understand how and why people DIE from falling into Wells.