

Safety Site

Monica Palmer, Safety Administrator

Recreational Safety takes Responsibility & Control

The following article was written for my Safety Story Contest earlier this year by Tom Distad. Thank you, Tom for sharing your story. We can all learn from another's mistake, and smile because we survived to tell the story.

“Would this help?”

About 30 years ago, I went cross-country skiing with a friend. We parked on the north side of highway 431, just below the south side of the summit, where there was a small building of sorts – just a wide spot in the road.

I had a backpack with extra warm stuff, like mittens, neck gaiter, some water, and a picnic arrangement; she had what she called her trusted fanny pack.

There is a pretty large set of rises heading down toward the Ophir Creek trail, with just enough pitch to make T-turns.

When we arrived it had been partly cloudy, and guess who hadn't checked the weather? But the snow was perfect, and it was fairly warm, so we headed out, south, climbing some, but mostly downhill. About 2 hours later, after snacks and water, and several climbs and downhill turns, we realized that it was starting to snow pretty heavily, and there was no visibility to speak of, except we could see the trees in front of us. “But!” Someone else was here, and we'd follow their tracks out! So up, and around, we went, and then found another set of tracks! We realized, sadly, that we had found our own tracks, and followed them around a large hill.

Yep! We were lost. And having realized that I had made many mistakes in my past, I readily explained to my friend “We're lost! I know where we are, I know where my truck is, but I don't know which direction is North! And I can't tell because the clouds are too low and the snow is too heavy!”. So, we stood there, starting to shiver, my dog making a hole in the snow so she could take a nap.

Wondering, “what do we do now? If we keep going up-hill, we'll just end up going in circles.” So, me, being less than a genius, kept saying “If only I knew which direction North was, I could find the highway.” But being fairly confident we knew where we were, we headed up hill toward what we thought was the highway.

Up and down, up one side of a hill, and down the other, navigating what we thought were valleys, or draws, between hills, we skied. And skied. After about a half hour we started to think we should be approaching the highway, but here was another hill! So up we went, veering slightly to our right, believing we were nearing the Mt. Rose summit. Near what we thought was the top of that particular hill, we found some tracks. Our tracks again!

I might have repeated that a dozen times, when my friend finally said “Would a **compass** help?” She had one in her “trusted fanny pack”. I didn't!

So, we found our way out, easy-peasey, only a few hundred yards below the truck. So of course, the moral of the story is, Monica posted a list of 10 essential items to take into the back country, about 5 years ago, and I am a staunch believer; don't go without them!