



AAC Publications

Found: A Life in Mountain Rescue

By Bree Loewen

Found: A Life in Mountain Rescue. Bree Loewen. Mountaineers Books, 2017. Paperback, 224 pages, \$17.95.

In this autobiographical work, Bree Loewen describes the hardships, sacrifices, and intense satisfaction associated with backcountry search and rescue. She is a longtime member of the Seattle Mountain Rescue team, an extremely busy organization with two to three missions per week. The often overstretched volunteer group operates out of two vehicles with no building to store gear or hold meetings.

Loewen is unique in that she is an almost full-time volunteer who finds the time, even with a young daughter, to attend numerous search and rescue missions, many of which run late at night, in inclement weather, and conflict directly with personal engagements, work, study and family events. But that is her life, and she would not have it any other way. In the book she describes her personal experience on many of these memorable missions.

As a technical member of the Alaska Mountain Rescue Group for 17 years, I strongly identified with many of her experiences. Loewen describes critical misinformation on many missions, the lack of the right equipment or people, the risks, and the strong friendships developed with members of the team through shared misery. She accurately describes the intense emotions of dealing with body recoveries from accidental falls or suicides, where no professional organization is able or mandated to do it, and it is left to volunteers to recover the body for family and friends. She observes that the consistent thankfulness of friends and relatives for a body recovery is often contrasted with the incongruous lack of appreciation for a life-saving rescue, when the subject is whisked off to definitive care, never to be heard from again.

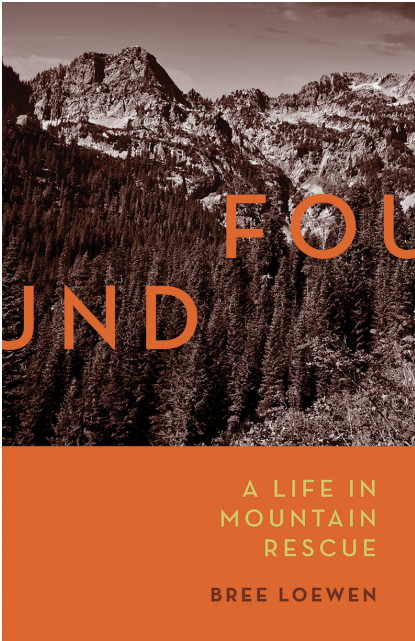
The difficulty of access to the rescue subject is usually the focus of her narrative, with the actual medical treatment and technical extraction often glossed over. Those wishing to learn search management and technical rescue techniques will be disappointed. However, details such as the skill required to tactfully manage the critical working relationship with law enforcement agencies, the tying of shoes at successive stoplights on the way to the mission, the malfunctioning personal headlamp, the use of a cell phone light to pinpoint a subject on a cliff at night, the transformation of searches with the ubiquitous use of mobile phones, location tracking, and GPS coordinates are all accurately rendered and resonate with my own experience.

In between detailing various missions, Loewen thinks deeply about why she is so committed to search and rescue, and why she is able to find a way to drop whatever she is doing and rush out, often far from home, for many hours or even days to help someone that she usually does not know. She skillfully articulates that her selfless priority in life is to help people in need, ahead of her family, work, vacations, and financial betterment. The title of the book is as much about her finding her place in the world as it is about finding people lost or hurt in the backcountry and bringing them home.

The search and rescue community will certainly enjoy reading this book, but it should also appeal to the broader climbing enthusiast looking to gain an appreciation for the motivation behind search and rescue volunteers.

– Matt Green

Images



Article Details

Author	Matt Green
Publication	AAJ
Volume	60
Issue	92
Page	362
Copyright Date	2018
Article Type	Book reviews