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Subject: **Please Help Me, I'm Falling**  
**A Review of Mountain Rescue Texts**

Instructional Support

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Technical Note

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There is very little information to be found on the topic of rescue in any of the current texts on climbing or mountaineering. *Freedom of the Hills*, *Alpine Climbing* and several other books have chapters on rescue but the range of rescue skills available is much greater than what is included in those volumes. This series of reviews lists the books available at this time on the topic of mountain and rope rescue. The books are listed chronologically from newest to oldest.

**Association of Canadian Mountain Guides Manual**, edited by Karl Klassen, published by the Association of Canadian Mountain Guides, 1991. This book contains 11 chapters on the craft of mountain guiding. It is primarily concerned with the technical aspects of the craft and is the only current source for some of the techniques shown. The chapter on rescue is 50 pages and deals with improvised rescues, including medical, search, raising, lowering, ascending, descending, counterbalance and avalanche rescue concerns. The instructional text, diagrams and photos are usually clear and easy to follow. There are a few mistakes, mostly minor in nature. Not surprisingly, no organized rescue skills are presented in this text. (NOTE: A 2nd edition [1996] of this book has just been released, but a copy was not available in time for this review.)

**A Manual of Modern Rope Techniques**, by Nigel Sheperd, published by Constable, 1990. This booklet is precisely what the name implies. A strong British flavor pervades the text which starts with basic knots and progresses to rock and crevasse rescue with much in between.

Although there is the occasional technique of dubious merit, most of what is contained will not get you into trouble. In fact, much of what is contained is designed to get you out of trouble. This book is somewhat expensive and difficult to obtain, albeit worthwhile.

**High Angle Rescue Techniques**, by Tom Vines and Steve Hudson, published by Kendall / Hunt Publishing, 1989. This is an exceptionally well laid out teaching text on rope rescue skills. It is written for organized rescue groups and does not cover improvised rescue. It does cover many topics of interest to general climbers. There are chapters on rope, hardware, anchors, belaying, ascending, rescue systems, highlines and helicopters. With the exception of the unfortunate use of cams and belay plates for rescue belays and several other details, I would recommend this as a reasonable reference on large scale rope rescue.

**Mountain Rescue Training Manual**, published by the Canadian Forces Survival Training School, 1989. Although no author or editor is listed, this internal military publication was primarily compiled by MWO Arnie MacAuley when he was posted to CFSTS in Edmonton. It is designed to provide members of the Canadian Forces Search and Rescue Technician trade with a standard reference to accompany their basic and advanced mountain and glacier rescue courses as part of their trade qualification training (level 5 and 6A). It borrows heavily from *Freedom of the Hills*, as well as from works by A Larson, B. March, W. G. May, T. Setnicka, and C. Shokoples. Topics covered include equipment, anchors, rock, snow & ice climbing,

organized rope rescue, improvised rope rescue, crevasse rescue, pulleys, highlines, avalanche rescue and much more. It is probably the only manual that contains written descriptions of many of the techniques. The diagrams and editing are sometimes crude and a few mistakes and out of date references now exist, but this is by far one of the most comprehensive mountain rescue skill compilations in existence. The only problem with this booklet is that it is not available to the general public. Find a SARTECH and borrow his copy!!

**Manual of U.S. Cave Rescue Techniques**, 2nd Edition, edited by Steve Hudson, published by the National Speleological Society, 1988. Although the focus is on cave rescue, once again there is a broad range of skills which can be used by the climber. After all, the 1990s is the decade of cross training. In 260 pages, this text addresses organization, management, search, medical, patient transport, vertical equipment & technique, and other problems unique to cave environments. There are many photos and diagrams to enhance the text. Once you have some mountain oriented texts to work from, try this one for a completely different change of pace. Many good ideas can be found here.

**On Rope**, by Allen Padgett and Bruce Smith, published by the National Speleological Society, 1987. This is not really a text on mountain rescue at all, but is fact a book on caving technique. How then does such a book find it's way into a rescue text review? It contains what is likely the best collection of technical information on vertical single rope techniques (SRT) that I have seen published. If you are truly involved in rope rescue, then read this hard cover beauty. If you are simply a climber, then the techniques are from a different world, but still good as general background and a change of perspective.

**Self Rescue Techniques for Climbers and Instructors**, by Nigel Sheperd, published by Adventure Unlimited, 1987. This is a small pocket book (75 pages) of basic self rescue information for rock climbing. It is amazing how confusing simple concepts can be made in such a small space. This overpriced gem contains some neat little ideas but is entirely superseded by "A Manual of Rope Techniques".

**CMC Rope Rescue Manual**, by James Frank and Jerrold Smith, published by CMC, California, 1987. (2nd edition now out but was not available for review.) Excellent diagrams and concise text, but an unfortunate emphasis on techniques such as using Gibbs ascenders for belays and far too much "CMC advertising" combine to make this only a mildly interesting book on organized rescue "California style". The price being asked is astronomical for the material contained. Find a friend who has laid out the cash for this one and borrow it for a couple of hours.

**Modern Rope Techniques in Mountaineering**, 3rd Edition, by Bill March, published by Cicerone Press, 1985. Composed of drawings of a number of different improvised techniques and explanations of same, this latest revision is still a bit disorganized and it remains difficult to find the subject you are interested in. The techniques discussed are fairly well illustrated and despite changes, the book contains an occasionally disjointed flow of thought. More than ever, this appears to be a collection of sketches with the text being 'how to' information pertaining to the diagrams. Much of the new material is similar to articles published by Mr. March and gives the impression that it was stuck into the book wherever it would fit. A better job of editing the old material to include the new could have solved this problem. A fourth edition of this pocket book could have easily correct these flaws to provide a superior reference on rope handling and improvised rescue. With Bill March's untimely death, this possibility has vanished. As it stands, "Modern Rope Techniques" falls a bit short of the mark, but is one of the few readily available sources of "self rescue" information.

**International Mountain Rescue Handbook**, 2nd Edition, by Hamish MacInnes, published by Constable & Co. This is an interesting reference work on British / European rescue technique which is once again aimed at organized rather than self-rescue. With 280 photos, charts and diagrams in this hard cover volume, it is a shame that we all don't have the resources pictured in this book, such as helicopters, winches, cable and litters. This is a well researched text with many interesting facts contained within, some of which may be useful to the average climber / rescuer. Read this book at the book store, so that you will not have to buy it.

**Wilderness Search and Rescue**, by Tim Setnicka, published by Appalachian Mountain Club: Boston, 1980. This is a massive text with a wealth of SAR technique contained within. A mammoth undertaking of this nature is sure to suffer many faults, and this book has its' share, but this manual is still worth owning as an overview of the many techniques out there (some of questionable worth). The illustrations are many and the techniques covered are legion. "WSAR" was published in 1980, and many innovations have come along since. The text does lean heavily on gadgets and in many instances, simpler and safer procedures could have been included that do not require mechanical devices. There are also some basic problems with some of the simple math explaining some systems. If you are interested in self-rescue there is little here that can be used without significant adaptation. For those working in organized rescue there is sufficient information to warrant a closer look. Don't believe everything you read.

**Mountain Search and Rescue Techniques**, by W.G. May, published by Rocky Mountain Rescue Group, 1973. A fine book on the topic of rescue which has stood the test of time exceedingly well. Being almost 20 years old, one would expect the information to be far less current than it is. There should be a place for this book on your shelf even if you have some of the other texts. This book is geared toward organized search and rescue rather than self-help.

**Mountain Rescue Techniques**, by Wastl Mariner, published by Austrian Alpine Association, 1963. Although most of the technique in this book is very dated, this was the former number one reference. For those interested in how many of our current techniques developed, this is an excellent, unique historical perspective. This book is long out of print and very difficult to find.

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The first version of this article originally appeared in "The Breeze" the newsletter of the The Alpine Club of Canada's Edmonton Section and is reprinted courtesy of Cyril Shokoples. Cyril is an internationally certified Mountain Guide and has been a member of the Alpine Club and Edmonton Section since 1975. He became a Senior member in 1979 and received the Silver Rope Award in 1988. He currently resides in Edmonton and is the proprietor of the firm Rescue Dynamics, which is involved in climbing, rescue and safety instruction, as well as mountain guiding. Further information on courses as well as additional copies of this and other technical notes in this series can be obtained directly from Rescue Dynamics. On the Internet, visit the Rescue Dynamics World Wide Web Site at - <http://www.compumart.ab.ca/resqdyn/>