

Susquehannock Trail Club News – 12-01-2022

By Bill Boyd

It may not seem like winter just yet, but we know it's just around the corner, and with it comes all sorts of weather. Most of the time our winters aren't too bad, but also at sometimes it can get real bad. It seems like a good time to read again the Pam Bales story, especially if you are one to brave some of winter's worst weather, whether it's hiking, skiing, snowshoeing, etc.

Ms Bales is a member of the search and rescue (SAR) team which operates in the White Mountain area of New Hampshire. Their beat includes Mt. Washington, which can have some of the worst kinds of weather at any given time, and it has claimed many lives over the years. Sometimes the difference in weather from the base to the peak can be like night and day.

On this day Pam had set off on a sort of self-training/testing herself hike in the area, which included summiting Mt. Washington. She was well trained and well-equipped for just about any kind of weather. She had her route well planned and had left contingency plans with a couple of her teammates in case she didn't return by a certain time. She even had a bailout point where she would abandon the hike and head back. It was t-shirt weather when she started up the Jewell Trail, but the higher she got the worse the weather got, causing her to add clothing a couple of times. The higher up she hiked the worse the weather became, until she was about ready to bail out. Then she saw footprints in the snow, and upon looking closely she determined that they were sneaker prints of all things. She got a bad feeling then, knowing that no-one should be up there in sneakers at that time of year.

She also knew that she couldn't stop now - she had to try to find this person as they could be getting into bad trouble. She did find this guy sitting in a snowbank, ill-dressed for this weather and well into hypothermia. For the sake of brevity, let's just say she got some warmer clothes on him, some hot chocolate into him, so he rallied around enough so she could get him off the mountain to safety. Even to the point where he got into his car and drove away.

The team heard from him later - he had gone up the mountain that day to end his life and would be forever grateful for being saved. By now most of us are aware of the dangers of hypothermia - to the point that you think you are just fine and sit down and go to sleep, forever. So, if with others in this situation, watch for the "umbles"- mumbles, stumbles and grumbles - and get to safety pronto.

Talk about a "Trail-Angel" - the world needs many more Pam Bales! So, google "Pam Bales - Mt Washington"- read and learn!