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The History and Importance of Ski Patrol

“I was sliding down (the hill) and people started yelling for the Ski Patrol,” Will Ashenbrenner said, sharing his story of Ski Patrol rescue at Cascade Mountain on January 2, 2022. Patroller Nick Coller “ran up the run and performed CPR. I was moved down the hill and transported by ambulance to Portage hospital. I spent a week there and I don’t remember any of it. Nick was awarded a Purple star for saving a life through emergency care through the National Ski Patrol.”

The Ski Patrol are a symbol of safety on the ski slopes. Their well-trained abilities allow them to protect skiers from the harms the hill can possess. The National Ski Patrol (NSP) was founded in 1938, beginning as an organization under Charlies Minot Dole. Their creed of “service and safety” has continued to today with over 31,000 members serving 650 patrols throughout the United States, Canada, Europe, and Asia. The bright red of the Ski Patrol is recognizable on the slopes. They are not only an identifier but a symbol of trust, confidence, and safety. The jacket has a high visibility brim and 360 reflective hits, making the patrols easy to see even in darker lighting. Sustainability is also a focus with the jackets with updates featuring a lighter, more durable fabric made from recycled, solution-dyed materials and a PFC-free durable water-repellent. This reduces water usage in the making process by 75%.

Jay Christianson has been on Ski Patrol on Granite Peak for over 30 years. “The immediate thing would be you need to be a strong skier or snowboarder with good fundamentals skills,” Christianson said. “Our primary job as patrollers is to give first aid and help injured guests get down off the ski hill so they can seek definitive medical care. You need to be in

situations from uncomfortable to dire... as you deal with medical conditions ranging from abrasions, concussions, dislocations, to compound fractures, injured spines and possibly, death.”

The National Ski Patrol’s core values are excellence, service, camaraderie, leadership, integrity, and responsiveness as they are the ones to assist with injuries and accidents on the hill. “EMT's and ambulances don't go uphill... so if someone's injured, they need help getting down from where they are on the hill to either their own car or to an ambulance in emergencies. Patrollers provide immediate first aid and transportation to help injured guests off the hill,” Christianson said. “Over the years, a lot of what happens blends together, and it's tough to remember everything. Often it's glimpses of which other patrollers were there, how a guest reacted to what was going on, or just an overall sense of how bad a particular accident was.” Christianson shared a few stories of rescues on the hill—a woman who crashed on the moguls and despite her broken leg, was joking and talking to the Ski Patrol the way down the hill and the faces of patrollers when helping a guest who was half unconscious and half flailing and combative. “I remember arriving at an accident to help other patrollers who were already there and were visibly shaken as we helped put a guest in a toboggan, wondering if they'd die at the hill, in the ambulance, or at the hospital,” Christianson said.

Granite Peak’s Ski Patrol has 130 volunteers, providing over 17,000 hours to the slopes. In 2006, Granite Peak Ski Patrol was recognized as the Best Large Alpine Patrol in the Central Division of National Ski Patrol and continues to offer the same excellence and service. Granite Peak urges those interested to sign up for the rewarding tradition met with pride and commitment. “Most patrols have some sort of tryout or familiarization period at their hill. Normally you check in with Ski Patrollers and they can direct you to a sign up or a person who

can tell you when that is going to happen,” Christainson said. The National Ski Patrol values diversity and is committed to providing a safe environment for all on the slopes.

Sources

National Ski Patrol, 7 Mar. 2023, <https://nspserver.org/>

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Interview with Jay Christainson: March 11, 2023