



## Mountain Rescue Doctor: Wilderness Medicine in the Extremes of Nature

*Christopher Van Tilburg*

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# **Mountain Rescue Doctor: Wilderness Medicine in the Extremes of Nature**

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**Mountain Rescue Doctor: Wilderness Medicine in the Extremes of Nature** Christopher Van Tilburg Christopher Van Tilburg, MD is an emergency room physician, ski patrol doctor, emergency wilderness physician, and member of the Hood River Crag Rats, the oldest mountain rescue team in the country. When Dr. Van Tilburg's beeper goes off, the call may take him racing up a mountain peak to rescue an injured hiker, into a blizzard to search for missing skiers, or to a mountain airplane crash scene for body recovery. Dr. Van Tilburg's work requires a unique combination of emergency medicine, survival skills, agility, and extreme sports. In Mountain Rescue Doctor, Van Tilburg shares personal stories of harrowing and suspenseful rescues and recoveries, including the recent Mount Hood disaster, which claimed the lives of three climbers. Mountain Rescue Doctor is an exhilarating tour through the perils of nature and medicine.

## **Mountain Rescue Doctor: Wilderness Medicine in the Extremes of Nature Details**

Date : Published November 13th 2007 by St. Martin's Press

ISBN : 9780312358877

Author : Christopher Van Tilburg

Format : Hardcover 304 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Nature, Outdoors, Health, Medicine, Mountaineering, Climbing, Medical, Adventure



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## **From Reader Review Mountain Rescue Doctor: Wilderness Medicine in the Extremes of Nature for online ebook**

### **Nick Jean says**

The book takes place in Mt. Hood Oregon, one of the tallest mountains in North America and is written by a mountain rescue doctor himself, Christopher Van Tilburg. Although it is not the most jaw-dropping suspenseful books out there, it is still nevertheless incredibly interesting. The author writes about his own personal experiences on the mountain and the trials and tribulations of being a mountain rescue doctor. He mentions the special procedures for each and every mishap that happens on the mountain. His successes on the mountain are incredible and the disappointments bring you to rethink why you would ever want to go on to a mountain ever. I would recommend this book to a friend and especially a friend who is pursuing a profession in medicine.

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### **Ignacio says**

Loved this book! Each rescue story was gripping and left you with a lesson. A very inspiring read.

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### **Debbie says**

"Mountain Rescue Doctor" is a memoir describing what it's like to be a part of a mountain "search and rescue" team. The author told many vivid, suspenseful stories about a variety of different rescues--some easy, others hard--over a particularly active year. The author is a doctor and often had to do emergency medical care under some extreme circumstances, but it was easy to follow what he was doing and the descriptions of the injuries weren't gory.

He also included information about the dangers of mountain hiking, biking, and climbing; a brief history of rescue teams in general and his group in particular; how the different types of searches are handled; the mundane aspects of being a SAR (Search and Rescue) member--like meetings and training; how being a on-call SAR member effects his family; why he picked this job and how he got training for it; and some stories about his recreational mountain climbing trips.

There were also several pages of impressive, full-color photos from several of the rescues that he described. Overall, I found this memoir well-written, very interesting, and hard to put down. I'd recommend it to anyone who likes extreme sports or who thinks the topic sounds interesting.

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### **David says**

Wonderful account of volunteer rescuers in the Pacific Northwest mountains, particularly Mt. Hood, Mt. Adams, Mt. Rainier, and Mt. St. Helens. What dedication!

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## **Nikko Lee says**

Why I read this book:

Every year that our SAR Christmas party, we have a Yankee swap. My coveted gift was Mountain Rescue Doctor by Christopher van Tilburg. Ironically, I had my hands on it for a few turns until it was taken from me and I went home with the book I had brought in to give away - How to Shit in the Woods. Fortunately, the book was passed on to me a month later.

My one sentence summary:

The more extreme outdoor adventuring gets, the worse the injuries when something goes wrong.

Kudos:

This book is filled with interesting details about SAR operations and wilderness medicine practices. van Tilburg gives a thorough account of incidents he participated in and the eager nervousness that sets in as soon as the call-out is received. The book contains incident accounts from several seasons and under a variety of conditions. From rescue to body recovery, Mountain Rescue Doctor runs the gamut of the more eventful SAR activities.

Quibbles:

At times the detail seems excessive or repetitive. I got the impression that this book started out as a collection of essays or notes on incidents that were later compiled into chapters. There is no progression from one chapter to the next and the sections are loosely organized by season. Several chapters contain references to how hard being an active SAR member can be on marriages. Enough so that I wondered when I'd read about the author getting divorced.

Final verdict:

This book is an interesting read about wilderness medicine and SAR activities in the Rockies Cascades. I liked it, but would caution potential readers to treat this as an essay collection rather than a continuous narrative.

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## **Stephanie says**

Solid! I've been really interested in hiking and mountain climbing and the search and rescue aspect of that was fun. A little stressful.

I liked the Winter section the best.

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## **Cougar Rochards says**

I found this book rather interesting. Mainly because of the adventures of the author Christopher Van Tilburg

and the Crag Rats. The Crag Rats are a team of people who have experience in climbing or being a paramedic/ doctor. This group of people go and save people who end up in some of the worst possible scenarios. The crew that is usually on the scene are Cam Axford, Todd Wells, Paul Crowley, Steve Castagnoli, Jim, and Christopher Van Tilburg himself. They provide people with search and rescue, services. I found all of the stories that Tilbur writes about to be interesting to have read. The story that really grabbed my attention would be the first one. All this talk about this golden hour made want to keep reading on. " We are still within the golden hour : I need to hurry" (Tilburg 15). This is one of the quotes that made me want to know what someone can due with in this golden hour. The plot toke me a while to get but I did eventually under stand that the plot was that the Crag Rats will due just about anything to save someone else's life. One of the of the stories that shows that is the very first winter one where they save a man from freezing to death. They whent out during a storm warning on the Zigzag glacier. I also like the use of sarcastic humor " Good night for a rescue for a rescue, I think. Darkness, wind, sow, ice, and cold all add up to a anger in the mountains by anyone's terms" ( Tilburg 200). This quote is one of the best instances of the humor present in the book. Over all it was a good book, I would recommend this book to anyone enjoys reading these types of books and to someone who likes reading books with a bit of suspense.

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### **Matt Ceriello says**

Matt Ceriello  
Mrs. Zucker  
American Literature Period 5  
15 January 2016  
Living in Mount Hood

The book Mountain Rescue Doctor was written by Christopher Van Tilburg, an Emergency Room doctor living in Hood River Oregon. This book is mainly about the author's life, and his experiences living in Oregon. He is part of a mountain rescue group call the Crag Rats. They respond to any emergency regarding rescuing people who may be injured or lost in the mountains. During the summer, the author's job focuses on hikers who need assistance, but in the winter however, his focus now includes skiers and snowboarders who may become injured on the mountain. I would absolutely recommend this book because it teaches the reader about saving lives and also contains thrilling stories about the author's mountain rescues.

One great aspect of this book is the fact that it is non fiction. That means throughout this book, the reader is learning real information. The author explains in detail how he goes about assessing life or death situations. One example of this is when the author says, "Altitude mountain sickness can occur at elevations as low as 5000 feet, but it is more common above 8000 feet, the elevation of many American ski resorts as well as many hiking trails and climbs in the West" (Tilburg 51). This is a prime example of the author essentially teaching his audience. Before reading this book, I was unaware of what altitude mountain sickness was, but now i'm fully aware. I sometimes snowboard during the winter so I am at risk of suffering from AMS. Thanks to the author, I can make sure I don't find myself being subject to AMS. Sometimes, the author goes step by step when dealing with patients: "The head-injury patient starts squirming and moaning as the medicine wears off. I quickly give her another dose of sedative"(Tilburg 82). Events like this occur multiple times throughout the story. The author is always makes sure the reader knows what's going on in the situation, as it may be difficult to understand while reading. I always thought that, who knows, maybe this information may become handy one day later down the road if we are ever faced with an issue like the author experiences every day. Another example of the author getting in depth medically is when he says, "It's clear immediately that we need to only rig a safety line, just in case Kyle or one of us slips on the rocks and splashes into the raging creek"(Tilburg 132). The author always takes safety first. Whether it be biking through the mountains, or rescuing someone in a life or death situation, he makes sure that he and the people

around him are not at risk or injury or death. It is always important for the rescue team to be safe as most of the time, the rescues they carry out are dangerous and could go wrong at any time.

My favorite aspect of this book has to be the exciting and suspenseful stories that the author shares about his experiences in the mountains. The rescue range from people being lost to people falling hundreds of feet of cliffs and unfortunately dying. One good story he shares is when he talks about a time when hunters encountered something interesting. The author introduces it by saying, “Four months later, two elk hunters in the Steamboat Lake area stumble upon human remains at Mosquito Creek, in what was a Priority Area 3, a heavily searched area” (Tilburg 159). This story in particular is very interesting because it involves human remains. This is very different from most of the other encounters that the author is faced with. Stumbling upon humans remains is the most bizarre thing that the author encounters. It turns out the remains were from a person who was reported lost. Another incident that the author had to respond to was when someone got bit by a snake. The author talks about it when he says, “A woman had been hiking in sandals when she stumbled upon a rattlesnake sunning itself on the trail and got bitten on her big toe” (Tilburg 189). This is a more reasonable situation for the author. A lot of inexperienced people get themselves into trouble when attempting to hike. It is the author's rescue group's responsibility to make sure that nobody becomes too seriously injured while enjoying the mountains.

The first chapter of this book immediately reeled me in and made me want to continue reading the book. The author's stories about his rescues are very detailed and suspenseful as well. His factual information made it feel like I was right there with him while he executed his rescues. I am very glad I chose this book and I always recommend it to anyone who asks about it. This book will have you so intrigued that you won't want to stop reading it.

#### Works Cited

Tilburg, Christopher. *Mountain Rescue Doctor: Wilderness Medicine in the Extremes of Nature*. New York: St. Martin's, 2007. Print.

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#### **Liralen says**

Loosely structured around a year of wilderness rescues, this reads more as a selection of connected essays than as a fully cohesive memoir -- not a lot of through-story, and the themes that are repeated seem almost accidentally so (that his wife thinks he spends too much time on wilderness rescue and with their young daughters rather than with her, for example). In places where he gets heavily into legal matters, historical precedent, etc., I am doubly convinced that parts of the book were previously published elsewhere -- not that either extra information or using old essays is a problem, of course, just that they aren't always as well woven together as I would have liked.

Still, interesting stories. Van Tilburg details rescues whether or not he had a significant hand in them, and while this may just be a matter of having a limited number of interesting rescues to draw from, it means that we get a more complete picture of everyone involved (and that he comes off as reasonably likable).

Wouldn't mind reading more in this general vein; it's a nice change from ER memoirs and the like.

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#### **Carl says**

This book is organized by seasons, and then, by rescue episodes. I do not know its history, but these chapters

could stand alone as magazine pieces in *Outdoor*. For that reason, there is a lot of repetition, but the stories are compelling and well-told. I initially rated this 3-stars, but as I read on, I had a hard time putting it down. I found it gripping and poignant, and gave it 5-stars in the end. I think the author really got across what his role as a mountain rescue doctor is, the feelings that he has about doing his job and the effect on his family, and how people who venture into the wilderness need to be prepared and always, always plan for the worst. I will remember this book as I plan to get out in the future.

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### **Kaelie says**

A reasonably interesting book about a doctor specializing in mountain rescue medicine -- sort of a fitness/wilderness-addicted mobile emergency room doctor except most of his work is volunteer (and unpaid). I liked that he at least attempts to explain the lure of dangerous mountain climbing in physical and psychological terms, and there are some interesting stories about rescues and injuries.

His wife suffers a lot in this book. He portrays her as being somewhat unsupportive of his determination to spend the bulk of his time volunteering to rescue fallen climbers, and while he talks a lot about his love for his daughters, his wife seems to be something of an afterthought. It's tough not to sympathize with the wife, since (1) she is the one who apparently has to hold down a full-time job so he can spend so much time volunteering, and (2) he's upfront about his Great Outdoors addiction and being unwilling to have a conventional job as a doctor. It makes him hard to like.

Finally, the book is horribly edited, with irritating typos galore.

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### **Karen says**

Even though this book doesn't read like a novel, I liked it a lot. Each rescue comes with useful information. The educational aspects of the book plus the suspenseful rescues make the book worth recommending to anyone who is an enthusiastic outdoors adventurer.

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### **Carrie Kann says**

I really enjoyed the gripping true stories of SAR in the Mt. Hood area! However, what kept me from giving this five stars was the obvious toll that the SAR volunteering took on his marriage.

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### **Monical says**

Short biography of a Wilderness medicine doc, his escapades and career. I enjoyed his shared insight into his motivation for being in the wilderness (mostly in Oregon), participating in relatively extreme sports, and participating in a wilderness rescue crew. He describes it as "tapping the root," which apparently is a surfer phrase for the combination of effects of endorphins and adrenaline. Explains a lot of why people are willing to go to extraordinary lengths to participate in extreme activities (climbing Everest, for example), and I had never heard anyone describe it quite that way. I thought the book meandered a bit and got a bit too far into

some of the rescues, at least for my taste.

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### **Karen says**

As a volunteer EMT-B and recreational hiker, I have long considered undergoing Wilderness Rescue training and certification; thus, I was immediately sucked into the premise of this book. As a Northeast dweller, I would rarely be faced with rescues above 5,000 ft, and reading this work makes me thankful for the comparative tameness of my local Appalachian topography. A hiker, I am; a technical climber, I am not! (Nor do I really wish to be!) That said, Van Tilburg does an excellent job at capturing the compulsion rescuers feel to assist others, a feeling much compounded when the injured party was involved in an activity that is also personally satisfying to them. Well done too, is his coverage of EMS humor and political squabbles that occur so frequently between groups. From start to finish, it is a good comprehensive portrait of EMS life - the check lists mental and written, the preparations, and the internal reactions that are all sparked by the vibration of a pager, the blast from the station siren, or the beckoning chirp of the radio's tones.

I heartily agree with previous criticisms posted of this book, that Van Tilburg's wife doesn't come out looking good from his commentary. The fact that he fails to thank her in the Author's Note (while mentioning everyone else in his life), makes me think that, sadly, this marriage didn't survive the manuscript stage. I feel sorry for his two girls who will undoubtedly read this book at some point (if they haven't already), and that they will forever have their parent's marriage quibbles committed to public print. For a father who seems to care so much about his children, one would think that he (or especially his editor) should have had the foresight to axe the marital declension subplot from the text! Alas... For the general reader, the fact that these personal digs have to be waded through at all detracts greatly from an otherwise compelling read. It is, I would point out, certainly true that being married to or in a relationship with someone who is involved in EMS, firefighting, or police (not to mention military) is highly stressful and relationships suffer over the long term. The frequently broken commitments to one's family (and the seeming gleeful willingness to do so) in order to run to the aide of a total stranger is not something easily endured, even by the most understanding of partners. Coupled with constant trainings, meetings, and fundraisers, the additional stressors borne by EMS personnel and their families is not a point to skip over lightly and Van Tilburg is right to discuss it, but he should have done so in a more considerate manner.

This book is an excellent read for anyone in or considering EMS, and especially for avid outdoor adventurists - it is a reminder to have fun enjoying the challenges offered by mother nature, but at the same time to be cautious to not put yourself - and the people who will ultimately then come rescue you - in unnecessary harm.

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