

Cliff Hanger

STEVE ROLLINS, MOUNTAIN RESCUE, YEARS ON JOB: 9

Mountaineer Steve Rollins figures he has worked nearly 100 rescues on the icy heights of Oregon's 11,239-ft. Mount Hood. He has dropped by rope from helicopters near the peak using night vision, slogged through whiteouts and climbed into crevasses. Between gigs, the 29-year-old holds down a computer job with Nike. But like the other members of Portland Mountain Rescue, his lifesaving work is pro bono: "You could offer me a paycheck, but it wouldn't make the job any more rewarding."

ROPE WORK

The elaborately engineered rope system shown here includes two double pulleys, 50 ft. of rope, and a block and tackle with a classic climbing knot called a prusik. "If it's not under tension it slides," explains Rollins. "If it is under tension, it grabs with a 5:1 mechanical advantage."

RESCUE LITTER

"Ending up in one of these means you have broken bones, spinal injuries or hypothermia," says Rollins. This Cascade Toboggan litter is light and tough, and equipped with a Plexiglas shield for the victim's head.

WORDS FROM ON HIGH

"When the pager goes off, this feels like an extreme sport," says Rollins. "We're going to follow our plan, but stay ready to adjust to whatever Mother Nature throws at us."

HARNES, PLUS

Hanging from Rollins's harness are a belay device, carabiners, webbing, and steel ice screws used to anchor ropes to the mountain's flanks. Other gear includes an altimeter watch, a GPS unit, and a multi-channel radio that is normally set to a standard search-and-rescue frequency.

ON HIS BACK

Rollins's pack, which can weigh 70 pounds, typically carries an expanding avalanche probe, a shovel, water, food, extra clothing, a 150-ft. climbing rope and at least one ice ax. "They have to be easy-access," he says. "You want to take your ice ax out before you get into steep terrain."