

CMC-SAR and HCSAR Put Tires, Trash, and Training to Good Use Above Balsam Ranger Station

Story by Nicolas Nouvel

If anyone happened to glance up the mountainside above the Balsam Ranger Station and spot a cluster of helmeted people carefully rigging ropes around a pile of old tires, the scene may have looked puzzling at first. But rest assured: this was not a rescue mission for vintage automotive relics.

It was another joint training day between Carolina Mountain Club Search and Rescue (CMC-SAR) and Haywood County Search and Rescue (HCSAR), with Frank Goldsmith, Sarah Henrikson, and Nicolas Nouvel taking part in a focused session on high-angle and ropes training. The steep terrain above the ranger station provided the perfect classroom for practicing technical rescue skills, strengthening coordination between the two teams, and reminding everyone that gravity continues to be one of the most reliable forces in the mountains.



High-angle training is not exactly a casual afternoon stroll. It involves steep slopes, rope systems, anchors, careful communication, and the sort of teamwork that becomes especially important when the terrain is trying to send everything downhill at once. It also requires something to act as the “subject” being rescued.

That is where the old tires came in.

In what may be one of the more career-redeeming moments in tire history, several discarded tires found themselves promoted from illegal dump material to simulated injured patients. At last, after years of loitering on the mountainside, they were finally treated with urgency, caution, and professional concern. They were rigged, handled, moved, and attended to with a level of care they had likely never experienced even in their glory days on the road.



To be fair, they made excellent patients. They were heavy, awkward, difficult to maneuver, and showed no initiative whatsoever in helping with their own rescue. In other words, from a training standpoint, they were ideal.

The day also included an intended cleanup mission, which gave the teams the chance to do more than just practice technical skills. Along with using the old tires as stand-ins for injured subjects, members of CMC-SAR and HCSAR removed those tires and other miscellaneous trash that had been thrown out on the mountainside above the ranger station. What better way to combine mission readiness and public service than by turning a dump site into a training opportunity?

It was a perfect volunteer formula: take a steep mountain slope, add ropes, rescue gear, and a suspicious amount of discarded junk, then send in a team of people willing to say, “Yes, this seems like a perfectly reasonable way to spend the day.”

This kind of joint training is one of the real strengths of the ongoing partnership between CMC-SAR and HCSAR. It builds practical skill, reinforces teamwork, and creates the kind of familiarity that matters when responding to real incidents. It also says something meaningful about both groups that even during a ropes exercise, they are ready to leave the area better than they found it.

CMC is proud of the continued involvement of Frank Goldsmith, Sarah Henrikson, and Nicolas Nouvel, working alongside the dedicated members of Haywood County Search and Rescue. Thanks to their efforts, the teams gained valuable high-angle practice, the mountainside lost a collection of old trash, and a few forgotten tires finally got the attention they had been waiting for all these years.

Not everyone gets rescued by a search and rescue team.

But apparently, if you wait long enough on the side of a mountain, even a tire can get its day.

