

EDITORS' NOTE

What is Wilderness Medicine?

Defining the field of wilderness medicine can be challenging, particularly for those who do not participate. The founders had a vision of a specialty that incorporates the essentials of practicing medicine in the outdoors without the “luxuries” of a hospital or medical clinic. Rumors abound of the early naming debates—should this group of researchers and practitioners be named the “Wilderness Medical Society,” the “Mountain Medicine Society,” or another, more specific title? Mountain medicine includes high altitude medicine, hypothermia, frostbite, and avalanche injuries, to name a few. Wilderness medicine encompasses mountain medicine, but its scope reaches far beyond. Dive and marine medicine, plant toxinology, animal attacks, and search and rescue all fall within this broad field. Difficult access to patients and environmental extremes are common elements that produce an array of challenges to medical practice.

This issue is a tribute to the expansive range of topics that comprise wilderness medicine. Scanning the Table of Contents, one sees articles on familiar topics such as hypothermia, lightning, and climbing injuries. But there are also articles on ultraendurance physiology, an elephant attack, and snake envenomation possibly confused with heat pathology. We also publish an article on

the possible toxicologic cause of death of Christopher McCandless, who died after foraging while stranded in Alaska. While research on this topic could easily find a home in a nutrition or toxicology journal, we believe that these specialties would not capture the essence of a man struggling to survive in the outdoors.

Our specialty has been defined through 30 years of research and clinical activity. The attention and interest that is being directed towards wilderness medicine in recent years is a testament to the efforts of the founders and developers of the specialty. Each individual that has performed research, helped another in the outdoors, or attended a conference hosted by the Wilderness Medical Society holds a piece of the creation and progression of wilderness medicine. Please continue to contribute, and the specialty will continue to thrive.

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