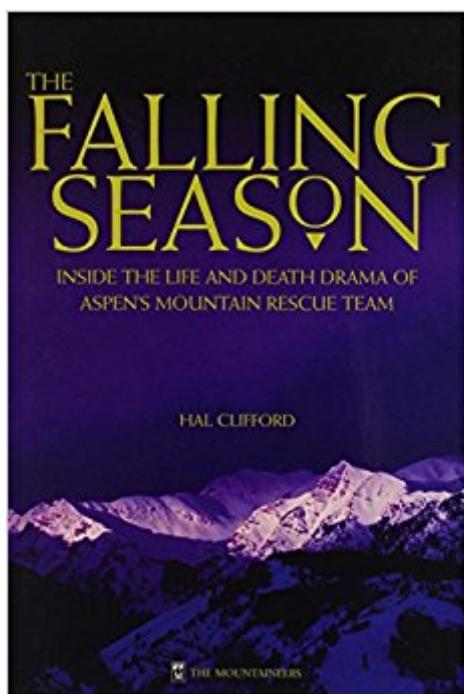


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# The Falling Season: Inside The Life And Death Drama Of Aspen's Mountain Rescue Team



## Synopsis

\* Offers an inside view of the dangers, emotions, and politics of a mountain rescue group\* Covers one of the most publicized mountain rescue operations of the decade: Express Creek To write fairly about mountain rescuers, journalist Hal Clifford was told, you must become one yourself. And so began the most challenging assignment of his career -- in the wilderness around Aspen, Colorado, where each year the destinies of a handful of skiers, hikers, and climbers intersect with those of their rescuers. The Falling Season is Clifford's thrilling account of an insider's life and time on one of America's premier mountain rescue teams. Giving new voice to the adrenaline rush, he recounts the harrowing moments and the against-the-clock, painstaking procedures of more than a dozen mountain rescues, including 1993's infamous Express Creek crisis and its attendant media circus. Throughout, he profiles his teammates, dedicated volunteers who leave warm beds and meals at a moment's notice and brave unimaginably harsh conditions to save an injured stranger's life. Here are their thoughts and motivations as they dangle from cliff sides, risk avalanches, and wait for fateful words on static-filled radios. Unflinchingly honest, Clifford also talks about the divisive politics, personal struggles, egos, and occasional unhappy outcomes that are an inevitable part of rescuing life.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Hal Clifford lives what he writes. As a member of Mountain Rescue-Aspen, an elite group of volunteers dedicated to helping those lost, injured, or worse in the rugged terrain surrounding one of America's favorite alpine playgrounds, he knows what it means to risk one's own life to save

another. He understands the excitement that lures people to the mountains and has witnessed the deadly consequences of ill-conceived, or just plain unlucky, outings. In *The Falling Season*, Clifford opens a window on the cliquish world of the "adrenaline junkies" drawn to the dangerous and heroic work of mountain rescue and offers first-hand accounts of actual emergencies. "I keep climbing, up toward a pile of rocks that is the 12,430-foot summit. I look up again and see a body, 50 yards ahead. It is lying head downhill, face turned up to the sky...." In crafting his story, Clifford reconstructs tension-filled events and mixes them with a chronicle of the team's long and colorful history. He focuses on the formerly unfettered group's ongoing struggle with the constraints of a litigious society, increased media exposure, and ballooning government bureaucracy. He attempts journalistic impartiality, but his personal involvement and emotional attachment show through, giving the story a powerful sense of urgency. Clifford possesses the technical skills, conditioning, and experience it takes to belong in Mountain Rescue-Aspen; fortunately for the reader, he happens to be a compelling writer as well. --George Laney --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Author Hal Clifford provides both the drama of search and rescue and the insight into the organization of such all-volunteer groups. (Skiing magazine) Engrossing ... Clifford hauls the reader up high peaks in a nail-biting search for both the dead and the dying, and for the spirit that animates those who rescue. (Ted Conover, author)

Even though the book was written 20 years ago, it still describes the politics that many teams go through to this day. Most MR teams still struggle with funding and oversight by local sheriff departments. Mountain Rescue personnel are volunteer, provide their own gear and even have to pay for their gas to get to the incident. Sheriff's departments assign SAR Coordinators, some committed, some not. The Sheriff's departments don't fund equipment or training. Again, it is paid for out of the volunteer's pocket. The team personalities described in the book can be found in teams today(2013). Recommended read for all current MRA members and those considering joining a team.

Wonderful TV Show!

The falling season is a tough book to review, since I am involved in SAR work, not in Colorado though. First off the author is an excellent writer and keeps the book moving along. He gets into the

personalities of the team members and when you do SAR work you realize that it is the interrelationships of the team personal that make or breaks your team. I think Mr. Clifford does a good job in detailing the day to day nuances of the characters in the book. I also think that he portrays a realistic look at the tensions that arise between the NEEDED paramilitary Sheriffs department and the free-spirited rescuers. The facts are that the SAR Teams are going to become more and more under the direct aegis of the Sheriff departments. That means more liability issues will be raised and in turn more Certifications will be needed to be a member of any SAR team. While this may be a noble objective it also had the direct dilemma of ostracizing the competent members on any SAR team. I have seen it happen, so sometimes the net result is a SAR team will lose some competent people only to be replaced by individuals that have passed the minimum sheriffs department certifications. While technically these individuals are qualified to perform a rescue they are as inept as any mountain neophyte is and in most cases a liability to the team. But this is the wave of the future and a reason why the author sees SAR teams being staffed only by paid people. One caveat for the any Non SAR person. This book does glamorize the work and makes it seem as non-stop action. I understand that the book has to do this otherwise it would be a bore to read. But real SAR work can be tedious and hard, no limelight, many days spent traipsing through buckthorn or on the side of some rattlesnake-infested ridge. You will come home on many days, dirty and tired, with fresh scrapes on your hands and faces oozing blood, just wondering just why you were assigned to search that area? But in the end it's always worth it.

A biased and straight forward view of the famous Aspen Search and rescue team from one of it's own. The rescues are real accounts, the effects on the rescuers are real, and the thoughts and interactions between the people are real. The book puts you into the shoes of the rescuers and tells the stories and follies of everyday people from the point of view of their heros. We see the struggle, the teamwork, and the impact life as a volunteer rescuer requires. We also view the ignorance and chances that people take in the outdoors. Under the drama of the rescues is also the life and interactions of the people involved. We see their good and bad sides. We are there as they make life and death decisions. We are a part of the team. The Writing itself is not overly fantastic, but the treatment of the subject and the feeling behind the words is at a depth that none but one of their own could have told the story. As a skier and backcountry recreationalist, I especially found the honesty and feelings portrayed as being similar to those I have felt in trying times and when dealing with those who tempt fate. Overall, a compelling story of the way man and nature interact both externally and internally when things have gone horribly wrong.

The Falling Season gives readers an inside look at the operations of one of America's best rescue teams, Aspen Mountain Rescue. This fast paced book also lets us inside the personal lives of several key team members and shows us the triumphs and conflict that inevitably exist in such groups. Truly an excellent book for anyone interested in search and rescue and outdoor sports or mountaineering.

As an Aspen resident for thirteen years, I have been exposed to Mountain Rescue and its good works for a long time. Friends of mine are members and have encouraged me to join since I have the background and interest. I thought reading the Falling Season might provide me with the insight I needed to make a life-changing decision. It did. Hal Clifford's detailed accounts of not only the difficult and dangerous, and often emotionally overwhelming, rescue work but the politics within the organization and between the different emergency agencies in Aspen convinced me not to join. If you are considering a trip to the backcountry, Hal's book provides an excellent cautionary tale. Simple plans can and do go tragically wrong.

I read this book when it first came out. As someone who's familiar with Aspen's team, and who's been involved in mountain search and rescue in Colorado for many years, I found Hal's book to paint a pretty good picture of what it's like to be involved in mountain rescue work. However, like a previous reviewer, I feel it's rather arrogant. Hal pumps-up Aspen's team while putting down other agencies, and I feel there are some questionable comments in the book related to this. There are many fine EMS agencies and rescue teams in Colorado (..and elsewhere) of the same caliber as Aspen's team. This book should have been more humble in that regard. Otherwise, I recommend it for anyone interested in this topic.

Great read on the harsh realities of SAR work. I used topo maps to follow along with the searches, learning a great deal about the Roaring Fork Valley and surrounding peaks. Very well written and I highly recommend it if you have an interest in Colorado mountaineering or SAR in general.

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