

ESOL News Oregon

Crag Rats are a special search and rescue team for Mt. Hood and the Gorge

(MAY 6, 2022) Mountain climbing and hiking are very popular outdoor activities in Oregon. Climbers and hikers are usually very careful, but accidents happen. People occasionally get lost. Sometimes equipment fails. This week, for example, one hiker was rescued near Munra Point in the Columbia River Gorge.

Sometimes government authorities need help to reach people in dangerous or remote locations. These kinds of missions can require special training or equipment. One special group has a long history in Oregon; it's a rescue team from Hood River called the Crag Rats.

The Crag Rats are the oldest search and rescue organization in the country. It started in 1926. The Crag Rats is a nonprofit organization, and everyone is a volunteer. They are specifically certified for technical rock and avalanche rescues and focus on the areas of Mt. Hood and the Columbia Gorge.

According to the group's website, the Crag Rats occupy and maintain the historic Cloud Cap Inn. This building is located at 6,000 feet on the north side of Mt. Hood. It is more than 100 years old. It is the base for the Crag Rats' work, including snow surveys, training, and rescue missions. The group also has another facility called the Crag Rag Hut, which is a lodge near Hood River. People can rent the Crag Rat Hut for weddings and other events; the rental income helps to pay the expenses of the Crag Rats' search and rescue missions.

The group's unusual name has a funny story. It supposedly came from the wife of one of the organization's original volunteers in the 1920s. Newspapers were writing about the volunteers' early activities and asked if the group had a name. The woman proclaimed them the "Crag Rats." (According to *Cambridge Learner's Dictionary*, a crag is "a high, rough mass of rock that sticks up from the land around it.") The woman said the team were in the crags of the mountain looking for people. And, she joked, they were just a bunch of rats because they left their families on the weekends."

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