**Injured Lexington hiker recounts rescue tale**

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Courtesy photo by Frank Angiola

More than 30 rescue workers from Maine and New Hampshire hiked up part of the Mahoosuc Trail to rescue William Tarkulich of Lexington. Tarkulich is expected to make a full recovery.

By Meghan B. Kelly

**GateHouse News Service**

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LEXINGTON —

It wasn’t until his brother-in-law Frank Angiola scrambled over to him that Lexington resident William Tarkulich realized he had fallen on his head.

The two men, along with Angiola’s son, were hiking along the Mahoosuc Trail in western Maine in the early morning of July 15. It was a rocky, perilous part of the journey with boulders as big as a house.

“It’s considered to be by most people the longest mile of the Appalachian Trail, because it’s so difficult,” he said.

Leading the trio, Tarkulich, 53, approached the next set of boulders, climbing 8 or 9 feet above the trail.

What happened next took nearly 12 hours, covered about 11 miles and required help from more than 30 people from two states after Tarkulich hit his head.

“I put my foot in and I slipped … the next thing I knew I was on the ground,” he said. “I landed on the side of my head.”

As Angiola rushed to his side, Tarkulich lay on the ground, trying to process what had just happened. He was dizzy and the right side of his face was bruised and cut, with bleeding in his right ear and right eye.

**Getting back**

With the help of some hikers who were passing through, Tarkulich was able to cover about a tenth of a mile in about two-and-a-half hours. Every 10 feet, he stopped to vomit.

Until the men reached a clearing, cell phones were completely unusable and out of range, said Tarkulich. The area is desolate and the trail head can only be reached by a rough, pothole-filled 10-mile road.

His nephew was able to dial 911 from the clearing. Tarkulich began shaking violently from the beginning stages of hypothermia.

“The temperatures were in the 40s to 50s and everything was wet … my body could not generate heat as fast as I was losing it to the ground,” he said.

Another hiker with wilderness first-aid training helped Tarkulich, while the rest of the group waited for a rescue team. There was some initial confusion, said Tarkulich, because the 911 dispatcher was not sure if the hikers were in New Hampshire or Maine.

Over the next few hours, rescuers from both states made their way toward the clearing. More than 30 showed up to help, according to the Sun Journal of Lewiston, Maine.

“What was amazing was the brilliance of the rescue teams; there was no bureaucratic baloney” about who was in charge, said Tarkulich.

“Mahoosuc Notch is reputed to be the toughest mile on the entire Appalachian Trail, and it very well might be,” rescuer Bob Baribeau of Mahoosuc Mountain Rescue told the Sun Journal.

The rescue teams put Tarkulich in a litter that had a wheel underneath, like a unicycle, as the area was too desolate for a helicopter, said Tarkulich. The rescuers alternated turns in moving the litter, and it took about two-and-a-half hours to get down the trail, covering more than three miles.

Tarkulich was conscious throughout the entire journey, pausing only when he felt sick. The rescue workers were concerned he would pass out and kept talking to him, to make sure he stayed awake.

“I really wasn’t worried about survival, largely because I knew I could move all my extremities, I could actually get up, I could think, I could remember,” he said.

**Recovering**

It was nearly 9:30 p.m. when Tarkulich was loaded into an ambulance and brought to a Berlin, N.H., hospital. There he spent two days in the intensive care unit. He’s got a hairline fracture in his temporal bone on the back of his head, and still can’t hear out of his right ear. He still feels dizzy sometimes and has headaches, but doctors told him it’s all to be expected after whacking his head on solid rock.

He has been warned to take it easy and has been working from home in his duties as a business manager at Hewlett-Packard in Marlborough.

But his prognosis is good — doctors expect a full recovery. He will be monitored on a regular basis and is following up with an ear, nose and throat doctor in Boston later this week.

Has this experience turned him off hiking? “No,” laughed Tarkulich.

“For me, going to the mountains is a spiritual thing,” he said, adding he may not go on hikes alone anymore after this experience.

Tarkulich credits the rescue teams with helping him not sustain any further injuries.

“If I ever needed someone to rescue me again, this group of people was just incredible,” he said.

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