Crews rescue injured snowmobiler

By CAROLINE LOBSINGER Staff writer

PRIEST LAKE — A Coolin man is recuperating from a broken leg following a two-day rescue that included an overnight stay in a rustic cabin and a ride out strapped onto a snowmobile.

Gary Smith of Coolin was "extreme riding" with friends about 12-15 miles in the back country of the Lion Head Drainage near Priest Lake about 2:30 p.m. Saturday when he fell off his sled on a steep hill while trying to traverse a log. Smith fell about 10 feet before his snowmobile landed on him, said Bob Abbott of Bonner County EMS.

He suffered a compound fracture and is doing well following surgery at a Spokane hospital, said incident commander Mike Nielsen.

"The terrain is so rugged back in there only the most advanced snowmobile teams were able to make it in," said Nielsen, who described the trail where Smith was hurt as an "almost vertical drop bowl."

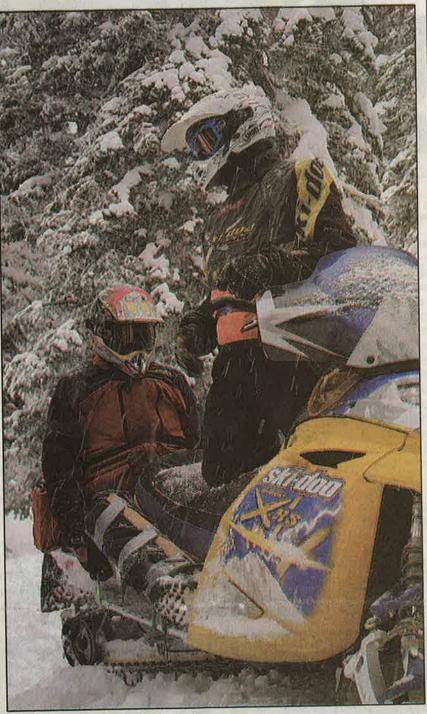
Rescue crews were advised of the accident about 3 p.m. Saturday and had a command center established in about an hour. However, because the terrain is so rugged, there was no way to evacuate Smith before dark.

Crews were able to transport Smith to a rugged cabin and take in a paramedic as well as a doctor to evaluate the snowmobiler to keep him comfortable until morning, Nielsen said.

After he was evacuated from the backcountry, Smith was transported by Priest Lake Ambulance to Newport Hospital before he was taken to a Spokane hospital for surgery.

Initially, Nielsen said rescuers had hoped to be able to transport Smith out by helicopter but were unable to because of poor weather conditions in Spokane.

had a small wood stove, small food supply and wood, rescuers were able to keep Smith warm, safe and comfortable until morning.



-Photo courtesy TOM HOLMAN

Gary Smith rides on Robert Hebb's Ski-doo for the trip out of Priest Lake with his splinted leg held up. He rode on the rear tunnel of the snowmobile that is padded and has a heat exchanger under it.

put up for the night and try again in the morning."

At first, crews thought they might have to walk Smith out because of him to a machine and got him out," "It was bad, but not life-threaten- the rugged terrain. However, some he said.

In a nearby rustic cabin, which ing," Nielsen said. "We decided to rescuers and snowmobilers were able to create a rough road in the snow with their sleds, Nielsen said.

"They basically bungee-corded