

National Guard rescues couple stuck on High Knob (TimesNews.net)
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HIGH KNOB – Members of the U.S. Army National Guard were called in Saturday night to help rescue two people who were stranded for an entire day on top of High Knob because of the weekend's heavy snows.

Wise County resident Aaron Fultz, 32, and an unnamed female passenger became trapped on the mountain sometime late Friday night when the vehicle they were traveling in slid into a ditch near Little Stoney Falls.

Scott County E-911 was notified just after 4 p.m. Saturday by Fultz's relatives, and the pair were located by rescue crews later that night at approximately 1:15 a.m. in the area where the vehicle left the road.

Authorities said the two apparently became stuck after deciding to take a drive on the mountain to see the snow.

High Knob, which is the peak of Stone Mountain, sits at an elevation of 4,223 feet above sea level. According to Scott County Emergency Services, the area received 20 inches of snow or more during Friday's storm.

Shortly after receiving the call Saturday, Scott County Sheriff John Puckett and a deputy were dispatched to the scene but failed to reach the pair due to hazardous conditions.

"There was 20 inches of snow and trees down everywhere across the road. I didn't have any way to get to them," Puckett said. "The governor had declared a state of emergency, and I asked them to call the National Guard to go out there. I figured their equipment would be a whole lot better than what we had."

Rescue crews from Wise County and the U.S. Forestry Service were also notified of the situation but were unable to perform searches themselves because of similar reasons.

A National Guard Humvee and a team of reservists from the Army National Guard's Gate City Armory were called in about 7:30 p.m. Saturday and used the GPS signal from Fultz's pre-paid cell phone to narrow down his location.

Because the phone was pre-paid, rescuers could only get a general idea of the area Fultz and his passenger were trapped in. Scott County dispatchers tried to have Fultz call 911 from his mobile phone to pinpoint his location, but those attempts proved unsuccessful.

After trying to reach Fultz and his passenger for several hours, rescuers notified dispatch about 12:45 a.m. that they were abandoning their vehicle and continuing the search on foot.

A half-hour later, rescuers found the pair, who were hungry but safe and in good health, about three or four miles from the nearest home.

Puckett said situations like this one show how important it is to avoid driving during heavy snow conditions.

“People should try to stay off the road as much as possible when we have weather like this,” he said. “They should avoid areas with deep snow, and only get out if it’s an absolute necessity.”

Scott County’s Emergency Dispatch helped coordinate the operation with the help of the county’s Emergency Management Agency.

Puckett praised those involved with coordinating the operation, as well as the National Guard for its efforts in the rescue.