

SNO-FOO AWARD



TO ERR IS HUMAN, TO FORGET IT WOULD BE DIVINE.

SNO-FOO 2011–Ken Rancourt

Mount Washington Observatory sits atop a mountain that features some of the worst winter weather, combining wind, whiteout and low temperatures. Ken Rancourt manages the observatory's scientific research. He has worked on the mountain since 1979. During this period he has made over 1200 trips up the auto road, more than anyone else, to the summit. Imagine that is the same as working for five years, commuting the same route every time, except the average speed is less than 10 mph with no other vehicles to distract you. Despite knowing this road like we know our driveways, Ken managed to get his snowcat lost, of course with the usual whiteout conditions, it was not enough to just look around. So how do you find the road in a blowing whiteout, stumbling out of your warm cab? How about using a snow probe? A snow probe could easily be driven through the snow to the easily identifiable pavement below. Despite being scientific manager of a station that is famed for snow and being a former ESC president and constant attendee of scientific sessions, no probe was at hand. Snow scientists are not supposed to be so easily lost in the snow and unprepared to measure the snow when they are.