

# Tough trek to gauge California snow

By Brian Melley, AP

We were trudging up the side of a mountain on skis to measure California's massive snowpack when a late blast of winter stopped us in our tracks.

I started the morning less concerned about strong winds forecast and light snow than keeping pace with veteran snow surveyors in the thin Sierra Nevada air and getting over steep, icy 11,700-foot Kearsarge Pass. Now, shy of that goal, I was struggling to keep warm and stay upright.

Howling gales warned to brace for impact. It didn't matter. Gusts bowled me over and toppled Kevin Klinefelter. Staggering to our feet, we followed John Dittli, making turns in a near-whiteout between foxtail pines. Blown downhill to our cars, we decided to return another day.

The arduous work of snow surveyors is largely unknown to most Californians, even as measurements they compiled of a near-record snowpack bolstered Gov. Jerry Brown's decision to lift an emergency declaration after five years of drought.

Crews stay out as long as two weeks in alpine wilderness, battling the elements, skirting avalanche terrain and plodding through deep powder to gather the data – a practice that has endured even as new technology tries to gauge the state's expected water supply from snowmelt.

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