



Every day's a school day

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You never think it could happen to you until it does! Having spent thirty years in the mountains and never getting so much as a scratch, the idea that I could injure myself whilst out training with the team never crossed my mind...

I'd had two excellent days in the Cairngorms with the team, putting our new trainees through their paces and we were heading off the hill for a final debrief and some tea and cake. As a winter mountain leader, it had been my job to go through the basic skills needed to operate in winter conditions and to ensure they had a safe and enjoyable weekend. So far so good!

I still, to this day, don't know how I managed to slip. We were a few kilometres away from the cars (I could see the car park), walking on a gentle slope downhill. The ground was wet and typically Scottish with lots of heather. I planted my left foot down and then my right — except that foot didn't stay where it was supposed to! My right foot slid forwards so I tried to lift my left to catch up — except it didn't move. I did a kind of 'box split' and heard a 'snap'. 'Shit' was the first thing to come to my mind. 'I've broken my leg and I'm supposed to be going skiing in three weeks'.

I fell over with my left leg doubled under me and landed in the mud. Everyone else assumed I was acting or that I had 'created' a scenario for the trainees: one last test. Nothing could be further from the truth! Another team member came up to me, knelt down and whispered in my ear 'Are you putting this on Will?' I explained with some expletives that I wasn't, I really wasn't!

Other team members caught up. I explained what had happened and that I was worried I'd broken something. We had a few RRMts with us (I am one too), and they checked me over; my ankle was swelling, but didn't seem to be broken,

nor was my leg. I decided that if I put my boot back on and I could weight-bear, I'd probably be able to walk back to the car. This seemed infinitely preferable than being rescued by my own team!

Sure enough, with some effort I was able to limp back down, get my boots off and drive back to the accommodation. Although my ankle was painful, I assumed I'd torn ligaments and I'd be ok.

When I finally got back home after a long drive, I hobbled along to my local walk-in centre (no pun intended), and sorted out an X-ray. As suspected, I had indeed torn the ligaments in my ankle but I'd also fractured my upper fibula — a spiral fracture to be precise.

Sadly, the only advice I was offered by the NHS was to rest and accept that I'd be off work for 6-8 weeks. Not knowing what I could or couldn't do, or how I could help myself get better, was really frustrating.

My teammates were fantastic. With a wealth of medical and physio experience, I was able to get advice and guidance straight away and this helped allay my worries and concerns. My initial conversations with our team welfare officer and team doctor really helped put things into perspective and they answered a lot of my worries. However, my skiing holiday with my family in three weeks was clearly off the cards!

It was clear I needed to get some physio to support and help my ankle, but I wasn't going to be able to get this from the NHS.

Luckily, I remembered a teammate had raised funds for the Rescue Benevolent Fund and I'd read about them in 'Mountain Rescue' magazine. I wasn't

sure how or if they could help, but I emailed the secretary (Judy) anyway.

I received an email back within an hour and by the following afternoon, she'd liaised with the trustees who'd agreed to support me by paying for my physiotherapy sessions! I had my initial screening with a physio five days after the accident and started bi-weekly sessions the following week.

I had two weeks of physio before we were due to fly on holiday and, thankfully, I was able to go (although I couldn't ski). Without these sessions, I don't know what I'd have done — they enabled me to get back up and running (literally) within seven weeks of the accident.

The benevolent fund has been amazing. They've handled all the costs (including paying for a strange rubber band that I wear when pottering around the kitchen) and the speed at which they acted was fantastic. I'm back on the call-out list now — these sessions gave me the confidence to get back on there to support my team. They also enabled me to take part in my family holiday and to get back into work. All thanks to support I received from benevolent fund.

I would encourage anyone in the mountain and cave rescue family who needs support to reach out to the team at the benevolent fund and if you've not found yourself in a positive of need, consider raising funds for them so that when a teammate does need their help, it's available to them. ☺

