

Province could close parks if users aren’t careful warn south Island volunteers

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By [Christine van Reeuwyk](https://vicnews.com/author/christinevanreeuwyk/) (<https://vicnews.com/author/christinevanreeuwyk/>)



Juan de Fuca Search and Rescue was called out two more times last weekend. (Courtesy Juan de Fuca Search and Rescue)

Amid record calls for rescues, volunteers remind park users to practise an abundance of caution as there is a risk the province could close its outdoor spaces. A pair of calls last weekend on the Juan de Fuca Marine Trail near China Beach highlight those worries, says Victoria Weber, senior SAR manager for Juan de Fuca Search and Rescue.



On Aug. 15 around 1 p.m., the SAR team was called for a man who fell down a cliff near the beach and was believed to have two broken legs. That call wrapped around 8 p.m. after the man was taken to hospital by helicopter.

Sunday, a couple out exploring waterfalls near China Beach got caught up when a man fell while carrying camping gear up a creekbed. The 911 call came in around 8 p.m. from a woman who had hiked to the beach.

The SAR team expected they were about 20 minutes west of the parking lot.

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“We sent a limited team out there but they weren’t where they said they were. We ended up searching and we couldn’t find them. They had become concerned about the tide and moved off of the beach but didn’t have any way to let us know,” Weber said.

Under lightning and rain, the couple was found shortly after midnight. The man was carried out by stretcher and passed off to ambulance around 2 a.m. Monday.

Weekend training in August near Port Renfrew also highlights how busy trails are this summer, Weber said.

Parking areas are overflowing and so are callouts for search and rescue. Last year Juan de Fuca Search and Rescue had 30 calls, an average of 2.5 per month. Last weekend’s calls surpassed that total with 32 to date.

“Our call volume is up, we’ve surpassed our annual total from last year. We really encourage people to get outdoors and enjoy the wonderful West Coast we live on, but with an abundance of caution,” Weber said.

Going overboard is key. Not only are responders putting themselves at risk of physical harm and COVID-19 exposure, Weber noted, but there’s concern the provincial health officer will close parks if people aren’t more careful.

Locally, last weekend 20 volunteers were out Saturday, with the knowledge a boat or helicopter could be needed, and another 30 were out for Sunday’s rescue.

Across the province, 79 ground search and rescue groups include more than 2,500 unpaid professionals tasked with 1,700 incidents in a typical year.

Last month Emergency Management B.C. recorded 333 search and rescue events across the province.

“This is an undesired record for any year. It is more worrisome a record has been set during a pandemic,” B.C. Search Rescue Association (<https://www.bcsara.com/donate/>) board member Jim McAllister said in a release.

READ ALSO: Military to fly old rescue planes longer as COVID-19 delays new aircraft (<https://www.goldstreamgazette.com/news/military-to-fly-old-rescue-planes-longer-as-covid-19-delays-new-aircraft/>)

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