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Injured student carried from Juan de Fuca Trail in hours-long rescue

Initial responders got to the student within an hour, but it was difficult to get her to the trailhead on a stretcher, as the terrain is rough and rugged



[Jeff Bell](#)

May 11, 2024 1:07 AM

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1 / 1 Rescuers make their way along the trail. VIA JUAN DE FUCA SEARCH AND RESCUE Advertisement

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This week's rescue of a student who fell on a school hike on the Juan de Fuca Trail and had to be carried out on a stretcher for about four hours is a reminder of the trail's dangers, says a search and rescue co-ordinator.

Juan de Fuca Search and Rescue was notified of the incident about 5:30 p.m. Wednesday after a 911 cellphone call was passed along by the B.C. Ambulance Service.

Co-ordinator Victoria Clarke said 13 Juan de Fuca team members responded and were joined by four people from Metchosin Search and Rescue.

"Metchosin helps us a lot," she said. "When we need extra people, they're always at the ready for us."

Clarke said initial responders got to the student within an hour, but it was difficult to get her to the trailhead on a stretcher, as the terrain is rough and rugged.

“We had to use ropes on a couple of occasions to secure the stretcher, and that takes time.”

The operation wasn’t wrapped up until the early-morning hours Thursday.

Clarke said the trail doesn’t always get the respect it deserves as a wilderness experience, in part because it’s only about an hour’s drive from Victoria.

It’s also shorter than the West Coast Trail — 47 kilometres long, versus 75 for the West Coast Trail.

“I think what happens is because it’s so close to Victoria and it’s a shorter trail, some people underestimate the challenges,” she said. “It’s really easy to go out not prepared, if you don’t have the proper footwear, etc.”

That’s not to say the school group wasn’t ready for the trail, because accidents can come up at any time, Clarke said.

“It’s got a lot of tripping hazards, a lot of steep sections, there’s roots on the steep sections,” she said. “I think even if you have all the right gear and you’re fit, things can happen. That’s just the nature of it.”

When conditions allow, the Royal Canadian Marine Search and Rescue can be contacted for a boat rescue or a helicopter can be used, but that wasn’t the case in this instance, Clarke said.

“As a team, we know we can’t rely on a helicopter or boat — we have to be able to perform this kind of rescue and that’s what we train for.”

There are 42 active members in the Juan de Fuca group who put in a combined 12,000 hours last year — an increase from 2022 — for callouts, training and other activities, Clarke said.

She said she always stresses the need for people to be prepared, and routinely directs them to the website adventuresmart.ca/programs/ for advice on getting ready for the outdoors.

The site features the Juan de Fuca Trail in one of its 11 trail-specific safety videos.

jbell@timescolonist.com

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