FULL TEXT

Surfer injured at Sombrio after wave slams log into leg

Friends and others on beach helped man stay warm during wait for rescue crew

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Times Colonist

Surfer Ethan Baker was just walking into the water at Sombrio Beach this month when he looked down briefly to attach his surfboard's leash to his ankle.

He had noticed a log in the water but didn't think much of it until a wave launched it into his leg.

He was knocked over by the impact, and when he looked at his leg, he could instantly tell it was broken.

"It was sideways," he said.

The 19-year-old called his friends over for help. Waves were lapping him, and they needed to get him out of the water, so they got him onto a surfboard as a makeshift stretcher to move Baker farther up the beach.

"That was the most difficult part, because they had to hold my foot, and you could see my bones sticking out. It was a bad angle," he said.

Baker was in excruciating pain while they moved him, but eventually his friends figured out how to hold his foot in a way that reduced the pain, he said.

Juan de Fuca Search and Rescue received the call around noon on Dec. 5, said rescue co-ordinator Victoria Clarke.

"It was severe enough that we wanted to ensure that he had quick access to medical attention," she said.

Cloud cover prevented a helicopter from reaching Baker on the beach, which is about 19 kilometres south of Port Renfrew, so crews hiked in a short distance from the parking lot.

Crews assessed Baker, stabilized his injury and carried him on a stretcher to a waiting ambulance, said Clarke. "He was extremely brave and very stoic."

Clarke praised the man's friends and others on the beach for keeping him warm for the roughly three hours it took for crews to arrive, because becoming cold and hypothermic is an added risk after an injury in cold, damp weather.

Baker said a man on the beach gave him a toque, a heat blanket and hot pads, boiled water for him and gave his friends a tarp to shelter Baker from the rain, wind and splashing waves.

"I would have been pretty cold if I didn't have him there," he said.

In hospital, doctors realigned Baker's broken tibia and fibula before performing surgery to install a metal rod and multiple screws in his leg.

Baker said he is grateful to search-and-rescue volunteers who took care of him and got him off the beach safely, and he's looking forward to getting back in the water once his leg has healed.

"I would love to go surfing again as soon as I can," he said.

The incident is a reminder of why it's important for those heading into outdoor activities to be prepared with supplies to stay warm and dry for a few hours in case they need to wait for help, Clarke said.

"Make sure you have easy access to warm clothing and medical supplies, even if you're surfing, because things happen," she said.

Juan de Fuca Search and Rescue crews more commonly respond to calls from injured hikers, Clarke said, but with the Juan de Fuca Marine Trail closed due to significant storm damage, the call volume has dropped.

Hikers appear to be respecting the prolonged trail closure, because the group has not received any calls from hikers on the trail, she said.

The trail remains closed through the winter. An update will be provided in the spring.

Search-and-rescue crews carry the injured surfer from Sombrio Beach to a waiting ambulance. VIA JUAN DE FUCA SEARCH AND RESCUE

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