

Bryn Williams - Llanberis Mountain Rescue Team

Talk at Austrian Alpine Club Autumn Gathering on his experiences over the last 25 years.

Lesson 1: Nobody plans to be rescued

It takes time for a MRT to get to you; how are you going to survive until then? It could be many hours, or even the next day if the conditions are dangerous for the MRT. Have Blizzard bags/blankets or a group shelter as part of team kit.

Read UK Hillwalking - How to Get Found Alive for further insight.

Pre-register your phone to 999 by sending 'register' to 999, then following the instructions.

Carry a laminated In Case of Emergency card in your top rucksack pocket. With details of emergency contact details and potentially allergies.

Lesson 2: Being comfortable with the uncomfortable

When the weather is bad don't hit the gear/tea shops & climbing walls. Go out for an easier lower-level walk. Get to know your gear, practice Nav, how to work in the wind and rain. Also join one of Nigel's night Nav exercises or go out and walk after dark - easy safe terrain of course. Build experience so when the do doo hits the fan you're more relaxed.

Lesson 3: It ain't over till it's over!

Getting to the summit/top of the climb doesn't mean it's over; it means you are half way there. It's only when you are back at the car/hut/tent is it over! 80% of MR calls are between 4 & 5pm, after the 3pm energy dip! We humans 'relax' when at the summit/top of the climb but for the descent we are tired; stop, snack, hydrate - then carry on down.

Lesson 4: When to call for help?

Don't try and figure it out yourselves, call for help before it's an emergency. We don't call due to embarrassment - don't forget MRT members are volunteers, they enjoy going out! When alerted MRT members have to get to their MR base. Get kitted up. Work out what's necessary. Where they are going. Wait for sufficient team members with the appropriate skills to arrive. Then get to you. This takes time, sometime hours. (See Lesson 1)

Lesson 5: Lemon Spotting!

Incidents rarely result from one mistake - rather a stack of small problems ('lemons') lining up. Examples include: poor acclimatisation, unfamiliar partners, late starts, moving slowly due to conditions, unplanned bivouacs. The goal is to spot and eliminate lemons early before they align!

Human Factors

We humans are hardwired to look for shortcuts. The longer we spend in 'risky' environments without issue the safer we believe we are!

We've also got '*gut*' feelings, these are important - if something doesn't feel right, say something.

With mountaineering partners always choose high trust over competency.

FACETS

From the Human Factor a film by Black Diamond (skiing based but relevant to mountains)

Familiarity — we may assume the terrain/route are safe because we've done it before.

Acceptance — we want to be liked and avoid looking weak. Social pressure not to turn back & ruin everyone's day (complacent).

Commitment — we've come all this way, we're going to do it regardless of conditions.

Expert Halo — assuming the most experienced person is always right. Everyone in the group has a right to speak, yes even novices!

Tracks / Scarcity — taking risks because it feels like the only opportunity to get this done. We're the first on the route, if we don't do it now we'll miss out!

Social Proof — assuming it's safe because others are doing it. Don't blindly follow others assuming they are more experienced than you.

Escaping FACETS

State we are in x FACET trap! Get everyone to voice their opinion. Always, be open to changing your plan. If you do come off the hill early, reflect as a group and cement in the learning.

Groups with different ability levels

Understand how the weaker members are seeing their day. Look through all the group's eyes and build trust. Make sure everyone has a voice and nobody thinks they are a burden. (FACETS - Acceptance & Expert Halo!)

Set expectations before the start; everyone should be a participant - dependent on their experience level.

Novices don't know or understand the risks; stop and look together. Use this as a chance to up-skill the novices.

How does everyone think they're going to get over this hazard (rock, stream, etc)?

The mountain will always be there tomorrow.