

Air Mercy Service to the rescue

 By [Katja Hamilton](#)

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The Cape Town Western Cape Department of Health EMS/Air Mercy Service (AMS) rescue helicopter has been in huge demand this festive season, and continues to be the difference between life and death for holidaymakers taking to the mountains.



Images credit: Lindsey Oyster, David Nel & Elvin Stoffels.

Between Saturday, December 18 and December 20, four multi-disciplinary mountain rescues took place from Ceres and Robertson Provincial to Tygerberg Hospital.

On Saturday, December 18, two mountain rescues were conducted on Lion's Head and Newlands Ravine, respectively. Early on Sunday, December 19, the rescue helicopter was dispatched to Fountain Ravine on Table Mountain for an injured hiker who sustained multiple injuries. On the technical section she fell roughly 10m.



Source: Supplied - Mountain Club of SA

Additional technical rescue teams and equipment were forwarded to the patient as this was a specialised technical rescue due to the location of the patient. The volunteer technical Mountain Club of SA mountain rescue team scrambled up the ravine to access and extricate the patient. A Metro Advanced Life Support (ALS) paramedic was on the scene. While busy with this rescue a second call came in, to which the rescue helicopter was dispatched for another mountain rescue in Sandy Bay.

Just after 9am on the morning of 21 December, the Western Cape Department of Health EMS/AMS rescue helicopter was dispatched once again for a mountain rescue on Lion's Head. An injured hiker was extracted and airlifted off the mountain.

On Christmas Eve, The Oudtshoorn Western Cape Department of Health EMS/AMS rescue helicopter rescued two holiday makers who were cut off between two rivers while heading back to their accommodation during 157mm of rainfall in the Karoo National Park.

Visitor safety

Table Mountain National Park (TMNP) has, in the meantime welcomed the deployment of the airbus H125 aircraft, redeployed from SANParks' Aerial Support Services to support the Sea, Air and Mountain (SEAM) Special Operations

Ranger team and K9 unit this season.



Source: SafetyMountain Tracking

The Airbus H125 rotary-winged aircraft landed in Cape Town this week and set on its first flight on December 18 to support the entire park-visitor safety and environmental crime prevention operations around TMNP.

Specially fitted equipment allows the chopper to provide real-time intelligence to ranger teams and K9 on the ground during visible patrolling.



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Safety on the mountain

While most accidents when hiking the Western Cape's beautiful mountains are unforeseen and out of our control, there are precautions you can take to better protect yourself before you leave for a hike, and to better manage the situation should you find yourself in trouble. Take note of the following safety tips:

* Don't hike alone - four is the ideal number.

* Tell someone reliable where you are going. Tell them which route you are using and what time to expect you back. If you are en-route and think you will be a bit late, call that person and give them the new time you will be back. They must know who to call and where to go look for you if you are not back in time. Alternatively, look into [SafetyMountain Tracking](#) by The Hikers Network. It is a free WhatsApp-based service that tracks hikers and other mountain users (runners and cyclists) on their adventures – giving them instant access to assistance in case of an emergency.

* Choose your route carefully. If you don't have a map of your route, look into [Forge](#) – the app incorporates a wide range

of user-friendly digital maps of the trails along the Cape Peninsula – more than 1 300 kilometres in total. The trails are digitised to minimise the possibility of getting lost along the way. Once you select a path, the Forge app will provide a digital overview of each trail. It includes the difficulty of the route, the distance of the hike and elevation to ensure you make an informed decision. To check on route closures go to [<https://web.facebook.com/HikersNetwork> The Hikers Network]].



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* Know your emergency numbers, and write them down on a piece of paper, just in case your cellphone battery dies or it is stolen. They are:

0861 106417 (Table Mountain National Park Emergency Number); 021 937 0300 (Mountain Club of South Africa Search and Rescue - Western Cape and Garden Route): Co-convenors: 079 8147801 (Wesley New) and 082 403 6994 (Brent Jennings).

* Always take waterproof clothing.

* If forced to stop due to bad weather, stay together and remain in one place. Find the closest shelter from wind and rain. If lost, don't split up - rather try to retrace your steps. Remember climbing down is far more difficult than climbing up.

Pay it Forward

* [The AMS](#) is the only aero-medical operator in Southern Africa which offers a complete package of air-ambulance, health outreach and rescue services, using a mix of fixed-wing and rotor-wing aircraft and ground vehicles. To donate to support their commitment to saving lives go [here](#).

* [The Hikers Network](#) Search And Rescue (HNSAR) unit is a service provider that falls under the Western Cape Wilderness Search And Rescue (WSAR), which in turn operates under the authority of the Department of Health Western Cape, Metro Rescue. Mountain rescues are co-ordinated with the generous assistance of many volunteers, including hikers, mountaineers, professional rock climbers, abseilers, cave experts, 4x4 enthusiasts, dog units, and helicopter crews. Metro Rescue provides medical and other important backup services. HNSAR members are trained and skilled along with other members of other WSAR service providers and organisations.

Should you wish to be a part of HNSAR, send an email to anwaaz@hikersnetwork.co.za or Khalid@hikersnetwork.co.za. Use "Joining HNSAR" as your reference in the subject headline.

ABOUT KATJA HAMILTON

Katja is the Finance, Property and Healthcare Editor at Bizcommunity.

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