

BMOE6001 Assessment 1- Critical Incidents in Adventurous Activities

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On March 7th, 2020, an incident took place on the Crib Goch trail, resulting in a man sustaining significant injuries, including multiple broken bones and severe facial lacerations. "The casualty was found to have fallen over 200 metres"... "with several plans to involve the Maritime and Coastguard Agency helicopter Rescue 936 being thwarted by the weather"(Llanberis Mountain Rescue Team , 2020). "Crib Goch is a serious mountaineering undertaking in wet weather, wind, snow, mist or ice."(Snowdonia National Park, 2023). On the day of the accident, it was predicted that the wind would be "progressively strengthening to 45 to 55 mph"(MWIS,2020) , which made hiking the Crib Goch trail extremely unsafe. The man who was injured was travelling with three other individuals, including a mountain leader. As per the mountain leadership syllabus, the mountain leader is expected to "Monitor the group, environmental conditions and activity, and can adapt their behaviours and decisions to meet ongoing safety, group and task requirements" (Mountain Training , 2022). Although the mountain leader of the group wasn't officially leading on this day, I feel that his training should have led to him evaluating if he should take the group down such a steep and slippery slope, given the unfavourable weather conditions. In this assessment, I will examine the group's decision-making process on the day of the incident, the resources available to them, and suggest alternative courses of action. Additionally, I will be considerate of their emotional wellbeing and stress levels surrounding the event and how this could have played a part in the way they acted.

After witnessing one of their team members fall rapidly down the slope, the remaining team immediately pursued their fallen group member. Unfortunately, the slippery terrain made the rescue mission challenging and risky. The team's eagerness to find their friend quickly led to an increase in speed and a lack of rationality, causing others to slip down the hill as well. Fortunately, the group was careful to locate ledges in the descent that would prevent further sliding and allow all members to catch up. In a book about preventing fatal incidents it is said that " the history of fatal falls indicates that attention to environmental circumstances - in this instance steep ground- is essential" (Brookes, 2018, p.129). The group had just witnessed their friend's fall, making them acutely aware of the dangers present in their environment. During the descent, I observed that the lead member of the group would occasionally pause and reach out to assist the other two men travelling down the slope with him. Having been on hikes with trainee mountain leaders, I have experienced this type of teamwork firsthand. Stronger members of the group would lead the way and wait during tricky portions of the trek to lend a hand to those behind them. This demonstrates the group's logical thinking and consideration for their safety and the safety of others in the group.

The team carried a variety of equipment to assist them during their hiking venture however, I believe that the overall kit list and its utilisation could have been improved to help them in an emergency situation. Initially, spare jackets and clothing were used to lift the injured individual from the ground to prevent hypothermia. Additionally, a group shelter was placed over the casualty as a blanket to keep them warm. In most cases a group shelter is used as a cover for all group members to sit under. It is used so that "everyone squeezes together and within minutes your shared body heat has everyone warming up nicely" (Clarke, 2022). Ideally, while awaiting mountain rescue, it would have been wise for the group to huddle together in the shelter, surrounding the injured person, to prevent further exposure to the cold and reduce the risk of hypothermia to all group members. When embarking on my own expeditions, I like to ensure that at least one member of the exhibition has a group shelter packed within their gear. This is particularly important as it prepares us for a range of

weather conditions, such as providing protection from the rain or cold, or alternatively, providing shade during a sunny day by tying it to a nearby tree to create a shaded canopy. There have been several instances where the group shelter proved to be a valuable asset during my recent mountain excursions, for instance, during a practice mountain rescue where we used the shelter to cover the injured person along with ourselves, while assessing their injuries, keeping us all dry and warm inside. I noticed that the team extracted a first aid kit from their bag of equipment however during the entirety of the treatment it remained unused. Although, at one point, a group member was searching through the kit, they were interrupted by having to tend to the group shelter that had come untucked from around the casualty. The first aid kit was subsequently left unattended. If I found myself in a similar scenario, I would have used one of the bandages to cover the bleeding head wound. This would not only help to prevent blood loss but also act as a form of insulation to maintain body warmth. The injured person also mentioned wrist pain but continued to move it around instead of keeping it still. One of the team members suggested keeping it in his jacket, but he still moved it around, potentially causing further damage. In such cases, it would have been ideal to immobilise the injured wrist by strapping it across the chest in a sling, using one of the bandages from the first aid kit, and then tucking it inside the jacket to hold it in place and avoid further movement.

In the event of a medical emergency, such as this incident, initial first aid administration is critical. The individual who first discovers the fallen body in the Crib Goch incident displays a constructive approach by realising the need to move the casualty off the ground followed by asking "Can you feel any breaks". This inquiry helped him identify the areas of pain and determine if moving the body to provide insulation between the casualty and the ground was safe. According to St John Ambulance guidelines, once a patient is conscious and breathing, a secondary survey can be conducted. The assessor should "ask the casualty short, simple questions about any symptoms and sensations they may be feeling" (St. John Ambulance, 2019), just as the man asked the casualty about any breaks. In addition, the assessor should also "look, listen, feel and smell for any signs of injury such as swelling, deformity, bleeding, discoloration or any unusual smells" (St. John Ambulance, 2019). In this case the assessor begins by noticing that the casualty's back is scraped and bleeding while he is moving some spare jackets under the injured body. Upon observing the scraped back of the casualty in that situation I would have personally suspected this to be a potential spinal injury. Considering the height of the fall and incident context, it is highly probable that the fall may have caused injury to the spine. The assessor who did administer first aid failed to recognise the possibility of a spinal injury and proceeded to move the casualty off the ground. In such cases, I would have waited for another member of the group to arrive at the scene, which someone shortly did during the Crib Goch incident, so that they could hold the neck and head in a straight and aligned position with the spine while I carefully rolled the casualty to put layers underneath them. That said, the individual who moved the casualty was most likely in a state of emotional shock, a typical response to a fight or flight situation. "When your brain is unable to process the situation, it freezes in an effort to protect your mind and body" (Gupta , 2023). We can't be sure if the man who found the injured individual was in a state of shock; however, what we do know is that the person administering first aid was a mountain leader, and their syllabus "requires evidence of a current first aid qualification"(n.d). If he had been following the first aid guideline and noticed the injuries along the casualties back he would have "to support their head until emergency help arrives and can take over, no matter how long it takes for them to come"(St John Ambulance , n.d.). But this is only if the person suspected a spinal which in this case he did not.

Over fifteen minutes after securing and wrapping the casualty with spare clothing and equipment, one member of the group decided to venture down the remainder of the slope towards the Pyg track to search for additional assistance. Even though the mountain rescue had been contacted, the team were uncertain about the time it would take for them to arrive. It is suggested that "For a team like Llanberis where around 20 team members live within 10

minutes of the rescue base, the response time to the casualty site may be 2 hours or more”(Howe, 2017). On his descent, the man took with him a compass to establish a bearing to return to the injury site and a whistle to call out to the group upon his return. Given the difficulty of finding a pinpoint location on a day with low visibility, like the one experienced on Crib Goch on March 7th, 2020, it was crucial for the leader to be precise and thorough while following the compass bearing to avoid straying off course. I have practised following a bearing in a variety of conditions and know that it is vital to stay on track during a day with low visibility. Any slight movement off course could highly reduce the chances of finding the group again. While additional assistance would have been beneficial in aiding the patient, the foggy skies and lack of grip on the slippery slope downhill increased the risk of the leader encountering an incident of his own, with no one around to help. If I was in that situation, I believe it may have been more prudent for the group member to remain at the casualty site, situated under the group shelter as I previously talked about, instead of searching for more help. The group provided the mountain rescue with the coordinates of their location through an app on one of the team member's phones, facilitating their search without the need to move from their location. It is noteworthy that the man who went to look for help is a qualified mountain leader, something that I am not. Although I may not feel competent to venture from the group alone doesn't mean that he felt the same way as well. He has been trained to work in mountain terrains and so will have plenty of experience and therefore be aware of his capabilities in this environment and so I can infer that he felt he was safe to make the journey.

During the arrival of mountain rescue, one of the group members blew a whistle to alert them of their location. This reinforces that he is experienced in the ways of mountaineering as “the internationally recognised emergency signals are six blasts on the whistle or six torch flashes repeated every minute”(Mountaineering Scotland , 2024). It's interesting to note that the first measure taken by mountain rescue upon arriving at the scene is to retrieve a group shelter, strategically positioned at the top of their bag, and request that everyone present takes shelter underneath it, whilst also sheltering the affected individual. This approach aligns with what I had previously suggested in this particular scenario, and it's reassuring to see that it's also the preferred method of professionals.

Upon reflecting on the incident, it's crucial to consider the various factors at play while the group was attending to the injured man. These factors may have caused distractions that prevented the group from prioritising their own well-being. Attarian (2012) suggests that “the best protection is an understanding of the risk and careful observation combined with appropriate equipment, clothing and tactics” (p.69). From my perception, I feel that the group did not have an understanding of the risk to themselves when they gave away all of their warm clothes. The team were distracted by the obvious casualty lying on the ground that they distributed their kit unevenly so that they were left with nothing to keep them warm whilst they stood idle on the mountain side. The deception in this situation was that the group thought they should put all of their focus and resources on the injured man without having any consideration for their own well-being. It is a priority for someone administering first aid to “always protect yourself first – never put yourself at risk” (St John Ambulance, 2019). In a similar situation, if I was to find myself leading a rescue operation, I feel it would be crucial to prioritise the well-being of all group members. This includes monitoring their physical wellbeing as well as their emotional state as well. According to NHS England, an individual's overall health comprises “environmental, physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual wellbeing”(2023). It is vital to attend to each of these aspects to ensure the safety and well-being of the group. To reduce the emotional stress that the group is likely experiencing, I would implement self-care practices, including offering support and maintaining open communication. I would also ensure that group members regularly check in with one another and ask, "Are you okay?" even if it's just a simple gesture to show support.

Undoubtedly, witnessing someone falling down a mountain and then searching for them in cold conditions is a frightening experience and so it's unfair to scrutinise how members of the group reacted in such a situation. In an ideal scenario, there may have been opportunities for the team to handle the incident on Crib Goch more effectively. Nevertheless, the entire team survived the trip and lived to tell the tale today. Moving forward, I intend to reflect on this experience and identify measures to reduce the likelihood of encountering similar challenges in the future. I have come to realise the significance of checking weather and terrain conditions before embarking on a hiking journey. Although we can assume the team had assessed the site's conditions, they were still compelled to descend, raising questions about their ability to interpret the severity of the weather conditions and their own capabilities. In the event of an unexpected situation, one's response may not always be rational, and critical knowledge may become lost in translation when it is most needed. To mitigate risks, I plan to include a prompt note in my first aid kit, reminding me or anyone requiring the kit to perform a full-body check and respond to injuries with caution to hopefully reduce the risk of mistreating an injury. In light of the severity of the fall and the emotional distress that would occur from witnessing such an event, I believe the team acted appropriately in response to the incident on Crib Goch. Swiftly discovering and raising the body with spare clothing likely played a crucial role in reducing the risk of hypothermia and ultimately preserving the man's life. Additionally, the team's quick thinking and efficient communication with emergency services allowed for a prompt and effective medical response. As outdoor enthusiasts, it is crucial to be prepared for the worst-case scenario when venturing into the outdoors. This includes carrying necessary equipment such as first aid supplies, extra clothing, and communication devices to call for help. Prioritising safety over the adventure is crucial, and we should never underestimate the risks that come with exploring the great outdoors. By being vigilant and taking precautions, we can reduce the likelihood of emergencies and ensure that we have a safe and enjoyable experience.

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