

## Our Volunteers

Millie tells us why she volunteers for LandSAR and how she felt and what happened on her first ever operation.

***“When I got to the police station, it was a lot going on with everyone getting their gear ready, teams being made up and the briefing taking place - lots of information and gear to remember. Heading to the callout I was excited - it was an area I had been in before so it could not be that hard right?”***

I think back to my first callout, I was mowing the lawns and was beyond excited having finally turned 18 and being allowed to go on an ‘actual’ operation.



Photo: Millie, right with sister Sophie on Left, Wakatipu 2020

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Well after an hour and a half drive, we left the truck with our packs on, did our radio checks and we were off.

Heading into the valley to walk the track and eventually put in containment where we would camp the night. Comms were low, we didn't hear from base often and if we did want to talk to them, we had to radio the DOC warden who would then relay to SAR base and back to us. This was all new to me - why couldn't we just talk to base many mountains away?!

We set up our camp and had just started the cooker to make some grub (about 10pm) and heard a very faint cry out for help. We looked up and here was a person stumbling towards us on the track. We turned off the cookers and ran to her. She was so happy to see us and threw herself into our arms for a hug as she burst into 'I'm alive and have found help' tears. She was so overwhelmed with what had gone on and so thankful that we had found her.



We notified SAR base that we had located our (the) missing person and they would then send in a helicopter in to pick us up as she was not in a state to walk several hours out. This was my first time flying in a chopper at night when the pilot and crewman had NVG (Night Vision Goggles) on. What an experience!

This search was an amazing experience and it felt close to me, because the missing person was my age - on a school trip. At the time it really made me think about the school trips I had been on and where I may go in the future and how this situation could be minimised.

On our way in we met the remainder of the school group and the two teachers. Seeing how distressed and worried they were hit home with what was really happening. When we located the missing person, and thinking back, it was such a special thing knowing that their mate would be reunited with them and it was a wonderful outcome!

Just knowing that I have some training and experience that I can use in my community and help save people's lives in the outdoors is such a humbling feeling, knowing that I can do something. To say I am a member of Search and Rescue is a pretty special thing and a lot of people thank us for what we do when it is brought up in conversation!

For me, SAR is part of my social life as I don't get off the farm much at times. We have a great group of volunteers that it makes all the time a blast. It is such a great organisation to volunteer for and I wouldn't have it any other way!"

**Millie Aitken**

June 2020

Wakatipu LandSAR field member

24 years old