

'There's Nothing More Exciting Than Saving Lives'

They're the women keeping us safe in Britain's toughest conditions. Hannah Bass meets two volunteers of Mountain Rescue and the Royal National Lifeboat Institution

Helen Morton, 45, is a search dog handler and a volunteer for Llanberis Mountain Rescue. Based in Snowdonia, Wales, it's one of UK's busiest mountain rescue teams. She also teaches mountain skills at the training company Snowdonia First Aid with her husband and fellow mountaineer, Steve

I've walked in all the UK's mountain ranges and I know Snowdonia like the back of my hand. I joined mountain rescue aged 21, in 1991 – I'd always been a walker but the trigger was my neighbour's son going missing while I was

at university. I was so frustrated that I couldn't help because I wasn't part of a rescue team, so I joined up as soon as I could.

We're on call 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Once my pager goes off, I'll get down to the mountain rescue base as soon as

possible and head up the mountains in the 4x4 (or, if we're lucky, a rescue helicopter) before hiking the last leg of the journey.

Sometimes we can use SARLOC, which works through the GPS on smartphones, to find people, or some walkers are able to give us a grid reference from a map. Other times they'll say something as vague as, 'we're

on Snowdonia', which leaves us with a huge area to trawl! When that happens, it's all down to deduction: we'll ask them where they started and what they've passed and try to track their route that way.

It's hardest when someone is reported missing – that's often where search dogs are helpful. My dog's called Cluanie and she's a pet, too – she sleeps on my bed every night. I'll let her off the

whatever first aid we can – as a first-aider, I'm always afraid of what I'm going to find and whether I'll be able to do enough.

I recently received a lovely thank-you letter from a woman who'd tripped and broken her arm and knocked out some teeth. We could have taken her down on a stretcher but, because she was holding her broken teeth in with her tongue, we managed to get her into a helicopter and

was abducted from Machynlleth in October 2012, will always stay with me. I was one of the last team members out looking in the mountains. When I got back to the car that night and still hadn't found her, I burst into tears.

My adrenaline's always running high on a search or rescue mission. Sometimes the conditions are really terrifying – I remember when I was once crawling along a ridge on my hands and knees in 80mph winds, thinking that I could die. That night, eight rescuers were injured. But once I saw my husband, Steve, waiting for me in the spot where we lower people to safety, I knew that I was going to be alright.

I do this work because as mountaineers everyone looks out for each other: we know that if we got stuck, someone would come to save us. There are days when the weather is absolutely terrible and I really don't want to go out. But I also get to see the mountains at their best – amazing sunrises in the early hours of the morning when I should be tucked up in bed.

'My adrenaline's always running high on a rescue mission'

leash to sniff out the scent of the missing person and as soon as I hear her barking, I know she's got something. She'll run back and forth like a shuttle between me and the person until I finally reach them.

When we've found the person, we'll give them a Blizzard Survival thermal jacket and maybe a hot drink to warm them up, and try and soothe them a bit before getting them off the mountain. We'll often administer

straight to A&E.

Saving lives feels incredible. I'll always remember rescuing a group of six children whose teacher had navigated wrongly and got them stuck in a gully near the summit of Snowdon. There could easily have been six fatalities that night, but we managed to use ropes to lower everyone down to safety.

It isn't often that I will cry after a call-out but the search for April Jones, the little girl who

39-year-old Sloane Phillips is an air ambulance paramedic – but that's just her day job. In 2013, she won a Women Of The Year award for her work as a lifeboat coxswain for RNLI

My pager can go off at any time and I'll run down to the RNLI (Royal National Lifeboat Institution) station, find out whether the smaller or larger boat is needed and prepare to launch it off the beach.

There's a huge amount of adrenaline, especially if the conditions are very rough, but I don't think I've ever been scared – there's always a job to be done so I don't really have time to think about it.

The smaller boat – which I can take out with a crew of just two – is used to help broken down or sinking fishing boats and yachts, or swimmers and windsurfers in trouble. In bad conditions we get very wet and blown about. As the coxswain, I'll check the radar and navigate toward the distress call, and sometimes I'll even end up taking the wheel.

What we do depends on what we find. If it's a sinking boat, our priority is to get passengers to safety on the lifeboat. We also do a lot of medical jobs and give first aid while we get the injured person to shore. We've helped a lady who hit her head on the boom of her yacht, and we rescued a fisherman who burned his hands and needed an ambulance.

My mum volunteered in the Hastings Lifeboat shop so I



Sloane at the helm of the rib

Woman's Weekly Real life



used to hang round there as a kid and I loved watching the boats launch. I started volunteering for the shore crew in 1995, aged 21, and was gradually trained as a coxswain.

In 2006 we took the smallest boat out into a gale to find a

'It's always satisfying when we rescue children'

swimmer in trouble. By the time we got there, he was unconscious and we had to pull him into the lifeboat and resuscitate him. We got him on to the beach and called an ambulance that took him to hospital, but we found out he died later on – the whole team

was gutted. But we knew we'd done our best in terrifying conditions, and we were later given an award for our work.

It's always satisfying when we rescue children from

the water – there's no better feeling than their parents thanking you. Often kids drift out to sea in their little inflatable boats, and I'll always remember one boy who got his head stuck between rocks when the tide started coming in. We freed him just in time and his father couldn't have been more grateful.

I was honoured at last year's Women Of The Year awards for my 18 years of service to the RNLI, as well as my full-time job as a paramedic with the Kent Air Ambulance. I've been with the ambulance service since 2002 and started working as an air paramedic in 2013. I've always been an outdoorsy person and there's nothing more exciting than rescuing people.

When I'm on call in the lifeboat, it's an amazing feeling – knowing I'm on my way to help someone in trouble. It's given me an enormous respect for the sea, too. No matter how lovely it looks, it can be very powerful. But that doesn't stop me going for a swim – in the right conditions!



Helen and Cluanie are a team