# Episode 20 - Search and Rescue - v1.mp3

**Inspector John Pratt:** [00:00:05] Hello and welcome to Tasmania Police's podcast, This is Tas Police. I'm Inspector John Pratt and I'll be your host as we chat to a wide range of Tasmanian police officers about why they joined the job and why others should too. We're coming to you today from Lutruwita, Tasmania and before we start our conversation, I'd like to respectfully acknowledge the Tasmanian Aboriginal people as the traditional owners of the land upon which we work and pay our respects to elders past and present. We recognise the Tasmanian Aboriginal people as the continuing custodians of the rich cultural heritage of Lutruwita, Tasmania.

**Inspector John Pratt:** [00:00:47] We've got a lot of talented officers at Tas Police and they all dedicate their skills and expertise to helping others and keeping people safe every day. Today's guests take that to the next level, often delving into the remote Tasmanian wilderness. Some of Australia's most rugged and unforgiving terrain to track down and rescue people who have found themselves in life threatening situations. We have search and rescue crews across the state ready to jump into action when people are missing, when bushwalkers take a dangerous turn or when something goes wrong on the water. Kristy Eyles and Callum Herbert are both experienced officers who have more than a few stories to tell. Today, we'll find out about some of their most memorable rescues, why they love the job and how their careers at Tas Police have taken them to where they are today. Thanks for being here today, Kristy and Callum. Let's start our conversation with some background information for our listeners. What is your career look like so far? Kristy can we start with you?

**Sergeant Kristy Eyles:** [00:01:36] Sure thing. So I joined Tasmania Police in 2005, so a little while ago now and worked in uniform for a couple of years. I worked at Hobart and Kingston. I moved over to public order and then I went to traffic, so a bit of a variety. Did my motorbike course at traffic and spent a few years on the road riding motorbikes. Did some time in the business improvement unit and then went back to uniform. But I was really lucky early in my career, only two years in, to get onto a search and rescue course. So I did that in 2007 and throughout my entire career since then, I've been a part time member of the search and rescue squad, which has been really good.

**Inspector John Pratt:** [00:02:11] Callum, what about you? What's your career looked like to this point in time?

**Senior Constable Callum Herbert:** [00:02:14] Thank you, Inspector. I joined the Tasmania Police Service in 1998 and was posted up to Burnie in the north west of the state and there I did uniform duties for a couple of years and then moved on to some traffic duties. I then moved into the criminal investigation branch out of Burnie where I spent six years. I'd always had an interest in marine policing and the outdoors and in 2009 I was lucky enough to get a position at Stanley Marine operating in the far north west coast of the state, which is a beautiful, beautiful bit of countryside up there. 2011 moved down to Hobart where I got a position at Marine and Rescue Services and my main role there was policing the fisheries and also part time in search and rescue. In 2018, I transferred full time to the Search and rescue office, which is an office of two, and I work with my sergeant and myself there.

**Inspector John Pratt:** [00:03:00] As you have both explained, you're both in different work areas but are involved in search and rescue. Kristy your part time in search and rescue. And Callum, you're full time. With that in mind, can you both tell us what a typical day involves for you in the search and rescue world? And Kristy , we'll start with you again.

**Sergeant Kristy Eyles:** [00:03:15] Sure. So I'm part time in search and rescue and I'm also part time with Tasmania Police. So as a primary job, my main job is I'm a sergeant at Glenorchy uniform, so I work general uniform duties out on the road, catching the baddies as I like to tell my kids, and I do that 0.5 so I don't work full time. And then as secondary to my primary role the rest of my time, I do search and rescue, so I'll do my primary role predominantly and then for our training days or if we get a job, I'll pull back from my primary role and switch over and do my secondary role. So I'm really lucky to have a lot of variety in my work.

**Inspector John Pratt:** [00:03:51] So I take it from what you say that you get a lot of call ins, whether that be on days off or while you're conducting your primary role?

**Sergeant Kristy Eyles:** [00:03:56] Yeah, absolutely. If I'm at work, then I'll drop my normal uniform and get my search and rescue uniform on and head off and do that. And other times, if I'm on a day off, I can be called in on those days off if I'm available to come in and do search and rescue jobs.

**Inspector John Pratt:** [00:04:09] Callum, as you explained your full time with the search and rescue squad, with that in mind, can you tell us what your day looks like?

**Senior Constable Callum Herbert:** [00:04:15] As I said before about my career, I've now been in search and rescue for 21 years, and that was as Kristy was on a part time basis. But now I've moved into a full time role. I work out of the Marine rescue office in Hobart and day to day I cover and organise a training for the southern region and also arrange and supervise skills enhancement courses such as snow survival techniques, roping and swiftwater training. Part of my job is also education and engagement of our volunteer groups. These are your bushwalking clubs, climbers clubs and the cavers. I take on the on call duties and my day to day is responding to any sort of search and rescue jobs that come in. And when I'm not at work and these kind of roles are covered by the part time members such as Kristy and some other officers throughout the state. My day to day jobs are, you know, missing people locally. These can include aged people, perhaps may have dementia or similar. We look for missing children. We have concerns for welfare if people might wander off from home and also obviously that we go and look for people that are injured themselves or get lost in the wilderness. And at the end of the day, I'm in search and rescue and I'm also at the Marine division. So I do boat work as well at the Marine division. What I've found is you have to be prepared and have the mindset that when everybody else is leaving because of the weather or danger, you're going to be the one that going into it.

**Inspector John Pratt:** [00:05:34] So Tasmania has got some very rugged coastline and some very dense and a lot of wilderness. Would you say that we're particularly prone to search and rescue operations?

**Senior Constable Callum Herbert:** [00:05:42] Yeah, absolutely. Look, Tasmania is a, you know, a wilderness covered state. The train does make it a treacherous place to visit. We do find that people get themselves in trouble when they go into the bush. But search and rescue is also has a lot to do with what's local as well. You know, I've been to jobs at the Hobart Rivulet where people have slipped down a bank and are unable to get get up it. Also, we have jobs in the middle of nowhere - the South Coast track and Freycinet Peninsula are particular hotspots for us at the moment and we find we're getting busier, but doing our job better with the use of PLBs or personal locator beacons. There's a real push now to carry these devices with you. There are other devices which allow messages to be sent through satellite. It just makes it safer. If someone injures themselves, we can have a real time conversation with them, get an exact location of where they are, and we can launch our rescue assets to go and save them from there.

**Inspector John Pratt:** [00:06:31] Krisy from your experience in search and rescue, are there any particularly treacherous areas in Tasmania?

**Sergeant Kristy Eyles:** [00:06:36] I don't know that I'd call them treacherous. I mean, I guess there's treacherous areas everywhere. Cliff lines are treacherous. But I think what makes Tasmania special and what makes being in search and rescue in Tasmania incredibly special is our remote wilderness, world heritage areas that we are lucky enough to have here. And it's the remoteness of those locations that I guess might bring in the treacherous element. If you make a small mistake somewhere off the side of an easy track that's easy to get to, then that's fine. If you make a small mistake and sprain your ankle on somewhere like what Callum mentioned the south coast track and you don't have a PLB. It could be days before someone can walk to notify police and that's why we really encourage everyone to carry that important safety equipment so that when people go into these remote, beautiful areas that we want people to be able to go to, they need to be really well prepared. So it cuts out the treacherous element and makes them more safe.

**Inspector John Pratt:** [00:07:27] Callum, you mentioned earlier that you have boats as part of the tools in search and rescue. Can you tell us a bit more about the search and rescue capabilities we've got within Tasmania Police?

**Senior Constable Callum Herbert:** [00:07:36] As you said, we do have several large patrol vessels. These are crewed and trained by experienced police officers. These can access all parts of the state and they go out to 200 nautical miles, which is a fair way off our coastline if required. And one of the main tools we use in search and rescue is the Westpac Rescue Helicopter, which is an amazing machine and this is also crewed by trained police officers and Tas ambulance staff. And weather permitting, this allows quick access and its winching abilities can really get us out of a pickle very quickly. Whereas if we had to send a land party in, it could take days or a really extended period of time to get groups in there. What people don't think about with search and rescue is some of our specialist skills areas that we train in. And as I mentioned before, these are both alone and in partnerships with other volunteer organisations. W,e as the police service are responsible for all non-urban rope rescue. So for example, if you slip down a cliff or something like that, we're the ones that have to go and assist in your rescue there. Tas police has a swift water rescue capability and we do this in conjunction with Surf Lifesaving Tasmania. We have cave rescue, which we've had a few off over the past couple of years. And also as a squad we practice tree access and we get into the some protestor removal training as well, which can be an interesting space to work in.

**Inspector John Pratt:** [00:08:48] Callum, the city of Hobart sits underneath Mount Wellington and last winter there was one weekend in particular where multiple people had to be rescued from the same location despite the mountain being closed and warnings being issued. What was that like for you and the team and why is it so important for people to listen to expert advice before venturing out into the wilderness?

**Senior Constable Callum Herbert:** [00:09:06] We had a very interesting weekend last year on Mount Wellington and we're blessed to have such a beautiful playground in our backyard. But what people forget is often the weather in Hobart can be completely different in Hobart itself as to what's going on top of the mountain. So last year we had a situation over the long weekend where strong westerly winds and snow were forecast. We put out some media releases telling people to be wary and to prepare for them conditions. So in a circumstance like this, it means places like the Springs on Mount Wellington can be calm and beautiful. But further up the mountain towards the pinnacle, there can be blizzard like conditions. Last year, one of the rescues we had, we had to walk through up to three metre snowdrifts which had come over the road, making any access just impossible. The wind up there was that strong that it blew blew myself to the ground and myself and some other officers and some council staff made our way to a group that had sought shelter in the toilet blocks at the pinnacle. As a trained rescuer, this was difficult, but really was kind of a safe and controlled for us as we trained in it and we have the appropriate gear. But for the people who were there, they were disorientated, not dressed appropriately and would have been quite terrifying for them. So we managed to get to these people and assist them out through the snow during the day. Later that night, as the search coordinator, I helped to task a group, including Kristy, to go and find two young people who'd lost the track in the dark.

**Senior Constable Callum Herbert:** [00:10:26] And these two youngsters were sheltering behind a rock up near the pinnacle. This was happening in darkness. And I took the first call from them and it was quite harrowing. By the time we got to them, they'd been there for hours and they were lost, hypothermic and scared. They'd lost their clothing, including their shoes, and we're very close to being unable to walk. So they were really in a really tight spot. If our SAR officers and wilderness. Paramedics hadn't been able to locate them at that time, I personally have no doubt that they would have perished that night. And it made me very proud and relieved when we got the call over the radio that we found them. Mind you, they did spend a couple of hours up there in them conditions just trying to warm them up before they could actually get them down out of the wind and off to hospital. That night we found them using mobile phone technology. And it's hard for me to put it into words how harrowing it is talking to someone in that situation. They were lost and freezing and waiting for our help. So in essence, what I'm trying to get at is it's best to check the weather and follow the advice of authorities when you're heading out, even if it's somewhere, you know, as local as Mount Wellington.

**Inspector John Pratt:** [00:11:26] Kristy, as Callum just explained, you were involved in that rescue on Mount Wellington. Can you tell us what happened from your point of view?

**Sergeant Kristy Eyles:** [00:11:33] Yeah, so it was a pretty horrendous night at the Springs. It was really nice. We turned up, we were in our nice warm gear that we get issued and that was all fine and it was pretty clear and reasonable and not windy at the springs. But walking up to the top of the mountain, I walked up over the zigzag track, which was on the sheltered side of the mountain that night and it was fine. Same time I set out another team set out across the top of the mountain, and we actually met at the victims at the same time. The missing people we located at the same time. Despite the fact that I'd walked for several kilometres and the other team had only walked for about 500m. That's the difference in the conditions on the lee side of the mountain and when you're in in the weather and when we got there, we popped our heads up to where these missing people were located and it was horrendous. It was ice in your eyes. They were dressed in cotton clothing so that the cotton clothing gets wet, it sticks to your body. It makes you colder. The clothing that we wear is designed so when it gets wet, it doesn't draw the heat away from your body.

**Sergeant Kristy Eyles:** [00:12:35] So we were okay, but we did have to spend. It was a good two hours with the wilderness paramedics and ourselves putting these people into emergency shelters, getting them warm enough so that they can move again, because I think one thing that people don't consider is the fact that the only way to get rescued when the conditions are so bad are to be walked out or to be carried out. A PLB or a locator beacon is a fantastic tool and we really encourage people to carry them. But if you press that button, the helicopter doesn't magically appear through the storm and take you out. Some land SAR people will walk in and they will do everything they can to warm you up and get you right and walk you out, or worst case scenario, carry you out. So that night we were able to warm the people through heating water up, using hot water bottles, getting them into dry clothing, getting them moving to assist them to self rescue with our help. And we all walked off the mountain that night. But it was it was very rewarding because I completely agree with Callum. Those two people would have perished on the mountain that night. They were hypothermic and really required help and saving.

**Inspector John Pratt:** [00:13:40] Kristy, Callum explained to us that he's a search coordinator. And I'm also aware that you're a search coordinator or search controller as well. Can you describe to us what it's like to conduct a successful search and what's involved in your duties as a search controller?

**Sergeant Kristy Eyles:** [00:13:52] It's rewarding and stressful and exciting and exhausting all at the same time. It's a really good job. There's a lot of moving parts, so we have extensive training to become search controllers. As a search controller, you're coordinating every aspect from speaking to the missing person, if you can, wherever possible. Or speaking to the missing people's families who have reported people missing. So getting the initial information, dispatching a team, selecting the most appropriate team, whether it be police search and rescue, some SES search and rescue, combination of both, any specialist assets that need to be utilised, like the rock climbing clubs. Boats, depending on if they're on water. The helicopter, if we can utilise that at the time. Briefing the inspector in charge of the area to let them know what's going on with your search, because search operations, by the pure nature of it, are all important jobs that the district supervisor needs to be aware of. So you'll need to do that. You converse with the local uniform members who hold responsibility for what goes on in their area as well. So there's a whole lot of things going on as the search controller, so there's a lot of moving parts. But when things come together and you get your team into the field and you get the call that we've found them, that is incredibly rewarding. And you can then turn around and make that phone call to the family or tell the family if you're with them that we've found your missing people or your family and they're safe and they're with the police and they might not be rescued yet, but we're there and they're safe, That's a really rewarding part of the job. It makes it all worthwhile.

**Inspector John Pratt:** [00:15:28] Callum, through your extensive time in search and rescue, what's the most memorable job that you've been involved in?

**Senior Constable Callum Herbert:** [00:15:33] I've had a couple over the years, one that springs to mind, A team of us got flown down in the late afternoon to an area called Cape Hauy down on the Tasman Peninsula. A climber had injured themselves and actually quite badly injured their back and was at the base of a 30 metre cliff in fairly strong winds. The rescue helicopter flew a roping team of us down to Cape Hauy, and we managed to hike down the cliff a little bit. And we were involved in a quite lengthy rope rescue off this injured patient who was in a stretcher up a quite a complicated cliff. Once we got him up to the top of that, we again got to carrying him gently in a stretcher up to the top of the hill where he was taken off the hospital and and made a recovery from there. So that was that job finished when the sun was coming up. And it was a pretty good feeling seeing the helicopter leaving with the patient on board at the end of it. As a result of that, the team, including myself, received the National Search and Rescue Award in 2019, which I think we're all pretty proud of. I've had another couple of jobs over the years. A couple of years ago, when I was on a marine patrol, we got a call about a fibreglass heavy vessel that had capsized in the surf zone near Swansea. It turns out that from a crew of three, two of them had been thrown clear and the third one was stuck under the hull, which you couldn't turn over because the boat was too heavy. He'd been heard banging at the inside of the hull during us arriving there. But by the time we got there, that had stopped. And my colleague from Marine and I held some grave concerns for how he was in there. That resulted in us actually smashing a hole through the hull using an axe and a mattock, which took a little bit of time. And we were lucky enough to be able to crawl inside the hull and take the gentleman out who were suffering from the effects of some fuel inhalation. And it obviously been under there for a while. That was very rewarding that he was okay and he made a complete recovery.

**Inspector John Pratt:** [00:17:13] It sounds like on both occasions there's two very, very lucky members of the public.

**Senior Constable Callum Herbert:** [00:17:16] Yeah. And look, in sometimes it's just a matter of being in the right place, the right time, and other times it's, you know, having the skills behind you or having the group of people behind you you can call on to go and deal with these jobs. One of my other favourite jobs or days in policing is now as I'm getting a bit older, seeing people that I've trained go out and rescue people and you just hear about how what a great job they've done. I'm finding that very rewarding as I age a little bit.

**Inspector John Pratt:** [00:17:41] Kristy, what about yourself? Can you tell us about some of your memorable jobs?

**Sergeant Kristy Eyles:** [00:17:44] Yeah, so one of my most memorable training episodes was we we did because as part of search and rescue, it's really critical that we keep our skills up. So not only do we go on jobs, but we go into the remote wilderness for training. And one of my favorite trips would definitely have been summiting Federation Peak. That was a really good trip and something that I probably wouldn't have taken on by myself if I hadn't have been in the squad. But with the support of the search and rescue team, we're a really close knit group. We work together and we walked together and did Federation Peak as one of our training walks, which was fantastic. One of my most memorable jobs was I can't remember when it was. It was a number of years ago now, but it was on Mount Rufus and we'd received a call and I'd been dispatched as a team of two. We went to Mount Rufus and we'd had a call that there was an international tourist who hadn't returned to her place of work, so she'd work locally. She'd gone for a walk on Mount Rufus for the day and she hadn't come back. So we didn't get dispatched until about 8:00 at night. We drove up there, walked all night. Our plan was to just walk the track and see if we could see her. Perhaps she'd heard herself on the track. But then a more extensive search would be undertaken the next day at daylight. If we were unsuccessful. We got to the top of Mount Rufus just as the sun started coming up. And as we got to the top, we looked down and we could see in the distance a little blue dot. And we yelled really loudly at the little blue dot, hoping that it was our missing person.

**Sergeant Kristy Eyles:** [00:19:05] And the little blue dot got bigger and we could tell that it was a person moving towards us. So we did lots of yelling and waving and discovered that it was our missing person. To this day, I think she's still one of the most amazing people and resilient people that I've rescued. She had spent overnight. It was really cold overnight. We were okay because we were moving, but she just had general street clothes on. The conditions were fine, but bitterly cold. She didn't have a windproof jacket or any sort of thermal clothing at all. She'd located a hut when she'd become disoriented. And inside that hut, there were some old cushions. She'd ripped the cushions apart and she'd stuffed the lining of the cushions down on inside of her clothing to keep herself warm overnight. And then the next morning, she'd got up. She'd had a look for the track, and she still hadn't been able to find it. But she decided to make her way straight back to the highway in the direction that she believed the highway was in. So it just demonstrated a real lack of understanding of the density of Tasmanian bush and the harsh nature of the environment that she was in, that she thought she could just make a beeline for the highway and that's where she was disappearing off to when we saw her that morning. So it's memorable for me because I just think if we'd walked a bit slower or if we'd been later in getting the call, there's so many things that could have gone differently and would have led to her never have been located. But as it was, we came together and she came back safely with us. So that was a really memorable one for me.

**Inspector John Pratt:** [00:20:33] Callum before we finish our chat today, do you have any advice for anyone who is considering joining Tasmania Police?

**Senior Constable Callum Herbert:** [00:20:38] Yeah, get on board. It's been a great organisation to work with for the past 25 years. It's a career for me and I'll be here till I retire, hopefully. My suggestion is, have a look at our website. It might not be for everyone, but if you want a job which is challenging and rewarding, then police should be the one for you.

**Inspector John Pratt:** [00:20:55] How about yourself, Kristy? Have you got any advice that you can give to prospective applicants?

**Sergeant Kristy Eyles:** [00:20:58] Yeah, absolutely. Just have a crack if you think it's something that you're interested in, just have a go. Because for me, I came from an office job where I couldn't see myself having a career in an office job forever. And one of my friends asked if I would help him with an application for Tasmania Police and as I was helping him with his application, I thought I might throw one in as well because I reckon I'd get to be outside and that sounds all right. And I got in. I've not looked back and I've had so many opportunities. You know, there's not many jobs where you can change stations and it's completely different. I've worked in Hobart, which was completely different to working in Kingston, which is completely different to where I work now in Glenorchy. I got to ride motorbikes for 6 or 7 years. I just my job was to ride around on motorbikes, doing traffic patrols around our beautiful state, and I get to go on trips like in search and rescue to Federation Peak. I've been on a plane halfway down to the sub-Antarctic. I've done things that many people, and seen parts of this state that so many people will never get an opportunity to see and do. And it's because of my career with Tasmania Police.

**Inspector John Pratt:** [00:22:05] I think it's fair to say that Tasmania is a magnificent part of the world. Having said that, there's also some very rugged wilderness and coastline that goes with it and I would imagine that with the increase in tourism and especially eco tourism, the role in your particular areas are just going to increase. And I think people that do get lost and get into trouble are very thankful that we have people like you. Thanks very much for your time today. Appreciate hearing your stories. And thank you.

**Senior Constable Callum Herbert:** [00:22:27] Thank you.

**Inspector John Pratt:** [00:22:32] That's it for this episode of This is Tas Police. I hope you enjoyed the conversation. You can stay up to date with all our episodes by subscribing on your favorite podcast app and you can find all our previous episodes on the Tasmania Police recruitment website: recruitment.police.tas.gov.au/podcast.