



## Smoky Mountains hiker rescued thanks to ham radio operators

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GATLINBURG (WATE) - A woman who became injured on a hike on Mt. LeConte in the Great Smoky Mountains was rescued Sunday thanks to ham radio operators.

The hiker was Judy Potter, 57, of Atlanta.

John Oakberg was hiking Sunday afternoon when he came across Potter, who had broken her ankle and was stuck on the mountain, with the weather getting worse by the hour.

"A lot of rain, wind, sleet, fog," Oakberg explains. "Nobody had cell phone coverage, but I had a hand-held ham radio with me."

He put out a plea for help to any other hams who might be listening.

"I heard the emergency call, but his signal was poor and it was very scratchy," says Dean Webb in Loudon County.

Webb and fellow operator Cleve Hayes, in Knox County, quickly set up a radio relay to another ham, Scott Wyrick, in Sevier County, from John Oakberg on the mountain.

"I could relay what he was saying to Scott, who was on the phone to the National Park Service, to get the information they wanted such as height, weight, age and does she have any medical issues," Hayes explains.

Medical and rescue rangers started out immediately, to the great relief of injured hiker Judy Potter, who talked to 6 News by phone Monday night from her Atlanta home.

"It hit a point where I was just in tears. You can say you're going to be tough and get out of this, but you just get weary. And I think having somebody come an hour or two quicker and being able to get moving helped keep my spirits going," Potter said.

Potter is scheduled for surgery to pin and plate two broken bones in her left ankle.

"People all over the place that I don't even know helped me," she says. "Thank you!"

The ham radio operators give the credit for the rescue to the quick response and hard work of the National Park Service rangers.



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