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Global Rescue Profiled by Canada's National Newspaper

GET ME OUTTA HERE!

Even the best-laid travel plans can go astray, often hundreds of kilometres from the nearest hospital. It's a good thing you can have the cavalry standing by with medical personnel and even a helicopter

GEOFF NIXON

TORONTO GLOBE & MAIL

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Blackstone Dilworth wasn't expecting any trouble when he set out on a recent camping trip through the Peruvian Andes. It was the septuagenarian's 10th trip to South America - just another excursion through some of the continent's toughest terrain. Nothing to worry about, he thought.

That all changed when he found himself in a tricky spot at 8,500 feet above sea level in the Colca Canyon in March of last year.

"We were on an extremely narrow trail ... with a mountain on my left and the cliff on my right," he says, recalling his hike.

I was looking for a place that was wide enough and I should have taken an inside path, but I was going to stand and let the person pass on the inside," he says. When he tried to change positions on the path, he slipped and fell about 15 metres straight down.

"I was rolling in rocks and cactus," he says. "For a few seconds, I stopped. [Then] I moved some part of my body and I started rolling again."

By the end, he was bruised, banged-up, and had a body full of cactus needles.

"I lost quite a bit of blood and I had a lot of cuts and scratches," Dilworth says.

With the help of his two travel companions he made it back to a safer place higher up on the cliff. One of those companions was a physician, who quickly determined that Dilworth needed medical attention. But after contacting his travel insurance company by satellite phone, Dilworth discovered his plan didn't cover mountainside triage. Fortunately, the physician had a membership with Global Rescue, a company that provides emergency medical and rescue services to clients travelling throughout the world.

Global Rescue agreed to extract Dilworth from the canyon and within hours, a helicopter arrived to pick him up. He was then put on a plane to Lima for immediate treatment and, eventually, flown home to Texas so he could recuperate.

The dramatic rescue was just one of thousands performed each year by private operators serving the travel market.

Such companies offer a variety of transportation and medical services to help travelers get out of unforeseen situations around the globe - everything from illness or injury to natural disasters or even war.

Their services do not replace regular travel insurance - which generally just covers expenses - but act as a supplementary form of protection for travelers.

Coverage starts from a few hundred dollars a year for those who choose to subscribe to selected services, but can also be acquired on a case-by-case basis - though it is much cheaper to pay in advance. Global Rescue, for instance, offers memberships for seven-day trips for as little as \$119; student rates starting at \$259; and individual memberships from \$329 a year.

And while these companies are not new - the industry has emerged over the past two decades - their business has grown steadily in recent years. Today they claim hundreds of thousands of members around the world.

Daniel Richards, president and CEO of Global Rescue, says his company's services are all about avoiding or dealing with the unexpected - like finding out that your travel insurance does not provide certain protection or privileges.

"People run into some pretty nasty surprises and they discover that they are not going to be taken home," he says. "They're the ones who are going to be responsible for [themselves]."

Richards says Global Rescue has served hundreds of clients with medical and non-medical emergencies in remote or difficult-to-access areas, including Lebanon during last year's conflict. And while he acknowledges that it can be difficult to extract people from dangerous situations, he says there is very little his company won't do for a client.

"We're not always going to be able to get there instantaneously," he says. "But what we can do is ... ensure that the cavalry is coming."

And it's not just leisure travelers who see the need to prepare for the worst; corporations see the benefits for their overseas operations and travelling employees as well.

Richards says the companies that use their services are Fortune 500 firms that put a premium on employee welfare. Whether in large numbers or individually, those who have been evacuated say they are grateful.

Dilworth, who was still pulling cactus needles out of his skin months after his fall in Peru, says he became a Global Rescue member after his experience.

"When something like that happens away from home," he says. "The first thing you want to do is get home to your own doctor and your own hospital and your own family. It's imperative that people have an insurance or some method to get them back."

To the rescue:

Global Rescue 1-800-381-9754; <http://www.globalrescue.com>

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