

I've had two accidents in the hills, both during solo mountain runs.

The first was around 2001, running the 30km Hawden-Edwards circuit (Arthurs Pass) in early winter. The conditions weren't ideal, with quite a bit of snow on Tarn col, and a cold wind. I pushed on, carefully, over the passes and on to Edwards hut, where I met up with the only other people on the circuit. A few kms south of the hut I was bouncing along the track through bush, in a bit of a dream, expecting to be out within another hour or so, when my right shoe unexpectedly caught on a tree-root. Flying forward I put my hands out to break my fall. I expected just an annoying tumble. What I didn't see was a sharp rock pointing up that my right knee slammed into as I crashed onto the ground, and which sliced through to the kneecap. The pain was instant and intense. I wondered if I could be able to walk and if not, if I could crawl to the hut or had enough gear to survive the cold night out (I wasn't carrying a locator beacon, but I was expected back that night, and had left intentions). I managed to tape up the wound and strap my leg, and was able to stand and hobble, and, with the help of some painkillers eventually walked and slowly jogged along the tracks and out to the river. Normally I'd walk across, but went further downstream to cross at the train bridge, then back to pick up a bike to cycle the 22km back to the car. I drove back to Christchurch where my doctor friend James cleaned and stitched up the wound. It healed up within a few months. I have since gone back and run this trip (in both directions) several times, but in better weather.

The second was in autumn (April) 2009, while running on the Traverse Range (Nelson Lakes) an area I had run in many times. I had jogged up to Angelus Hut, and then on up Angelus Peak for fine views. The weather was settled and perfect. I was descending west from there to see how much further along the rocky ridge I could get. Near Sunset Saddle at around 2000 metres I crossed the top of a steep gully; as I stepped across the rock under my feet gave way so I grabbed a large and sound-looking rock – unfortunately it also came away in my hands. I fell backwards, along with a lot of rock falling with me – losing my footing, and ending up on my back facing downhill on a steep slope with a large rock pinning me by my lower right leg. Fortunately I had not hit my head or hurt my back; my main concern was whether I could move the large rock off my leg which felt very sore – adrenalin helped me push it off (causing me to slide head first a bit further!) but my lower leg had a big gash in the front just above foot, and was bleeding. Hoping my leg or ankle wasn't broken I managed to stand up, with some pain. It wasn't a great place to be, no shelter, about 3km from the hut, the first km of which was across steep untracked broken rocky ground, and about 22km from the car. Although I had a locator beacon I hoped to get out if I took it easy, since I had plenty of daylight left (it was 11am), and a small head-torch if I needed it -- I had fairly extensive bruising and minor cuts, but only my lower leg was injured. I put on jacket and thermal top since I was shivering from shock. I strapped my leg, and the wound to try and stop the bleeding, and took some strong painkillers and began slowly working my way down towards the hut. The first km or so was slow and pretty hard, but once I got onto a track it started to get easier. I did not know it at the time but I had severed my anterior tibia tendon that runs down the front of the lower leg and holds up the foot from the inside. At the hut I decided to head out via the Cascade track that drops straight down to the valley which is sheltered, with huts and water, rather than the more exposed but shorter Robert Ridge. A dreamy 20km later I made it to the car and drove 4 hours to Christchurch to an all-night medical centre to get the wound cleaned and stitched up. However the severed tendon later required reconstructive surgery and I spent 10 weeks in plaster, crutches and a moon boot. Looking back I was very lucky not to have been more seriously injured in the fall.