

South Wales teacher's epic bike ride in aid of Morrison Hospital

A South Wales primary school teacher will cycle a mammoth 1,000 miles to Geneva this August, in aid of the Swansea NHS Trust hospital which helped him recover from serious head and facial injuries sustained in a French ski accident in 2003.

Gavin Rees, 29, who is originally from Milford Haven and now living in Cardiff, will undertake the cycleGENEVA challenge (cycleGENEVA.co.uk) with his friend Duncan Edwards, 34, from Reigate, Surrey, who was also injured in the same accident.

They will set off from Milford Haven in West Wales, cycling to Alpe D'Huez in France, via Geneva, to celebrate Gavin's recovery and in thanks for the support and ongoing care he has received from Morrison Hospital's Maxillofacial Unit.

In February 2003, Gavin and Duncan were among a party of teachers from Reigate Priory School in Surrey reconnoitring the French resort of Les Gets, in the Portes du Soleil region, for a school ski trip.

Due to post-traumatic amnesia, Gavin and Duncan's recollections of what happened are unclear, but from information pieced together from eye witness accounts, it appears they collided while traversing a ski run in Linge in the French Alps.

Gavin, a primary school teacher at Bryncethin Primary School in Bridgend, said: "If it wasn't for the quick thinking and actions of members of the ski party, pisteurs and mountain medical staff, the outcome would have been significantly worse. After being airlifted to hospital, it transpired I had suffered extensive facial, head and brain injuries, as well as breaking my leg and tearing my anterior cruciate ligament.

"Fortunately, Duncan's injuries were less severe, although he suffered cuts to his head and leg, and several cracked ribs."

At the Hospitaux Universitaire (University Hospital) of Geneva, Gavin underwent a 19-hour operation performed by head of Maxillofacial Surgery Professor Michel Richter and his team. Among his injuries were major and multiple fractures of the cranium, frontal bone, nose, orbits, ethmoid bones, mid-face and anterior skull base, together with damage to his brain and leg.

Gavin's head injuries were so extensive that 130 screws and around 21 plates were used during his surgery – believed to be the highest number used in surgery in Europe.

"The standard of care I received at the Hospitaux Universitaire of Geneva was first rate, and I credit Professor Richter with saving my life – I will be forever indebted to him and his gifted team," said Gavin.

A month after the accident, Gavin was deemed fit enough to be transferred back to Wales, where he was put under the expert care of Mr Adrian Sugar, consultant cleft and maxillofacial surgeon at Morrison Hospital and honorary senior clinical lecturer at the Swansea Medical School.

“Mr Sugar and his team at Morriston worked closely with the Medical Applications team at the National Centre for Product Design and Development Research at the University of Wales Institute, Cardiff (UWIC), using cutting-edge 3D scanning in the planning of my surgery. The follow-up surgery and aftercare I received from the hospital was exceptional and, I believe, instrumental in my recovery,” said Gavin.

“Earlier than predicted, I was able to return to work in September 2005 as a supply school teacher in South Wales, and I am now employed teaching seven to nine-year-olds (Years Three/Four) at Bryncethin Primary School.

“It’s been an incredible physical journey since the accident in 2003, to get where I am today. Now I’m preparing and looking forward to a different kind of journey – cycling all the way back to Geneva to raise funds for Morriston Hospital,” he added.

Anyone wishing to donate to the cycleGENEVA fund, which will go directly to the Maxillofacial Unit at Morriston Hospital, can visit a special website set up by Gavin at cycleGENEVA.co.uk for further details and progress updates.

(End)

Notes to editor:

- Swansea NHS Trust’s Maxillofacial Unit at Morriston Hospital and the National Centre for Product Design and Development Research (PDR) at UWIC formally established the Centre for Applied Reconstructive Technologies in Surgery (CARTIS) in February 2006.

It brings together the existing facilities and expertise of both Morriston’s Maxillofacial Unit and UWIC’s PDR for the benefit of patients with diseases including cancer, face and jaw deformity, and injuries, as well as close collaboration with neurosurgeons.

The Centre aims to make Wales a world-leader in the research, development and application of advanced medical technology.

Maxillofacial surgery deals with the treatment of conditions of the face, jaws, mouth and head and neck. The two organisations have worked together closely over the last seven years, to pioneer the use of advanced product design and development technology in head and neck reconstruction and prosthetic rehabilitation.

- Professor Michel Richter, head of Maxillofacial Surgery at the Hospitaux Universitaire of Geneva, and Mr Adrian Sugar, consultant cleft and maxillofacial surgeon at Morriston Hospital, are both leading figures in the AO Foundation, a non-profit international surgical organisation based in Switzerland, which has been responsible for many of the major developments in facial reconstruction over the last 25 years. Visit www.aofoundation.org/portal/wps/portal/Home
- Gavin and Duncan’s route from Milford Haven to Alpe D’Huez:

Leg one, August 2 – Milford Haven to Bryncethin

Leg two, August 3 – Bryncethin to Marlborough

Leg three, August 4 – Marlborough to Reigate

Leg four, August 6 – Reigate to Calais

Leg five, August 7 – Calais to Amiens

Leg six, August 8 – Amiens to Paris

Leg seven, August 10 – Paris to Orleans

(Gavin and Duncan's route from Milford Haven to Alpe D'Huez cont.)

Leg eight, August 11 – Orleans to Auxerre

Leg nine, August 12 – Auxerre to Dijon

Leg ten, August 14 – Dijon to Sons-le-Saunier

Leg eleven, August 15 – Sons-le-Saunier to Geneva

Leg twelve, August 16 – Ascent of Alpe D'Huez

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