

Landmine clearance legacy that Diana left

WHEN I first cleared landmines, I was absolutely petrified," says mines clearance expert Rachel Brock.

She'll be at the Royal Welsh Show from Monday to Wednesday next week, on her first visit to Wales and the first time the charity she works for, the HALO Trust, has brought along its dummy mine field, complete with skull-and-bones mine signs and explosive-free landmines. The blue body armour and protective visor, which show visitors will also be able to try out, was made famous when Princess Diana walked through one of HALO's mine fields in Angola in 1997.

Prince Harry has carried on his late mother's work on the landmine issue, visiting mine fields in Angola and Mozambique.

Rachel works in a support role for HALO, and learned to clear live landmines as part of her training.

"It was very, very scary," she says, recounting the first time she approached a landmine along a densely-laid belt of devices in Cambodia.

"I was inching and scraping towards it, knowing it was there, and very, very happy once I found it, that that was it, it was revealed and I could move on. Once I'd done that first one, I felt a lot more confident. You gain confidence as you go on."

The charity was founded in Afghanistan in 1988 and now removes mines and devices in 27 countries and states around the world with a mission to protect lives and restore livelihoods for those affected by conflict.

The passion in Rachel's voice is evident as she tells me about what HALO does, especially as her job means she meets people who've been maimed by the explosive debris of war.

"When I started with HALO I was 23," she says. "After Cambodia, I had my daughter and now I'm a parent, it hits home a lot more."

"When you're in these communities, this is their reality and it's something I don't have to worry about as a parent."

"I never have to worry about her running

around playing and there being mine fields nearby, and it puts it a lot more into perspective."

She speaks to people who've been left disabled by landmines, many of them caught in an explosion when they were children.

"They've grown up with amputations or injuries from landmines, and their resilience is phenomenal, their ability to get on with it and continue on with their lives is very inspiring."

"It just makes you want you to do more and help more people, so they don't have to go through it," she says.

The HALO Trust was founded as a response to the global humanitarian catastrophe caused by landmines.

The problem was particularly acute in Afghanistan where thousands of civilians were being killed or injured by landmines and their presence was preventing the return of tens of thousands of refugees.

Former British soldiers who had first-hand experience of the devastation there resolved to do something about it and founded the trust, with current statistics demonstrating how vital the work is.

Around the world, some 8,000 people are killed and injured by landmines and other explosive debris every year and 78% of the casualties are civilians.

Rachel talks me through the process of clearing landmines, something she'll be demonstrating to those who pay a visit to the UK Government marquee at the Royal Welsh Show.

"When we go to an area, we do an extensive survey, where the conflict was, who was fighting which side, if there was an area they wanted to defend. You get an idea almost militarily of where the mine field would be."

"Often, in a lot of the places we work, there aren't maps of where the landmines are. So you have to speak to local communities about where the accidents are."

The farmers and people from rural communities who come along to the Royal Welsh Show will appreciate what Rachel says next, as she explains

the accidents they hear about in conflict zones don't just involve people.

"Often we find out from cattle accidents," she says. "Cows and sheep will obviously just wander in. Losing livestock in Zimbabwe is a particular problem, that's losing \$100 to \$1,000 for a family who desperately need it for survival, so livestock accidents are huge problem for a number of countries."