



Teesdale & Weardale Search & Mountain Rescue Team

Newsletter - Winter 2020

HAPPY NEW YEAR EVERYONE! - Welcome to 2020

A quick introduction: I have recently taken up the newly created post of Support Members' Lead, which includes looking after our Associate Members and putting together a newsletter to keep you up to date with some of the activities of the Team. As a past team member and Team Leader I hope to use some of that experience in the new role.

Chris Roberts

Becoming operational - A trainee's journey

Don McCartney

In December 2017 my family and I moved to Durham. In search of a new adventure and keen to pursue my love of outdoors whilst developing my skill set, I applied to join TWSMRT shortly after. After successfully passing the initial hill assessment day I was accepted onto the trainee "C List" team. Having been a Scout Leader for the best part of a decade in the Tynemouth District and trained both Scouting and Duke of Edinburgh candidates for their hill walking adventures, I thought my outdoor skills were fairly reasonable; but as I embarked on my initial years training with the team, that illusion was soon shattered, and I found myself on a somewhat steep learning curve in my quest to become a full hill team member.

Throughout my training year I have immersed myself in amongst the team's old hands regularly attending the fortnightly evening sessions, monthly Sunday training exercises and trainee navigation sessions kindly put on by Des. In order to integrate myself more in the team, I have attended non-compulsory training sessions, fundraising events, event covers and regularly assist with preparing and cleaning the team vehicles and equipment prior to and following training sessions. This has also allowed me the opportunity to further familiarise myself with said equipment and feel grateful to the more experienced members for their assistance, support and frankly trust with this.

We have been introduced to a vast array of exceptional training opportunities beyond just 'first aid' and navigation including abseiling off the base roof, recovering team vehicles from boggy terrain and recovering training casualties from some of the most stunning scenery our County has to offer. In doing so I have experienced weather phenomenon's I didn't even know existed and seen some of our diverse wildlife in close quarters whilst putting skills learnt in a more 'classroom' environment to use in a more realistic setting immersed in a team of friendly, experienced and supportive



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members. This has allowed me to quickly hone my navigation, medical and search techniques skills.

In early December I was put through my paces successfully passing a number of assessments including equipment knowledge, vehicle set-up, radio etiquette, scenario protocol, personal equipment checks and then as the wind and rain really set in...the fabled night navigation test. As a result, I was awarded an early Christmas present of my team jacket. Despite some Oscar worthy training “casualties”, I wait in nervous anticipation, for putting my new-found skill set into practice for real. I have come close on my maiden call, with heart pounding I eagerly sat in the centre seat of Control going over my training in my head to ensure an optimum performance but was stood down en-route.

I am grateful for the opportunities afforded to me by my team, and look forward to repaying them in kind with my support on calls outs through 2020.

Winter training

James Chilcott



The Teesdale & Weardale region is low risk for avalanches but the team still needs to be operationally prepared and practiced in these skills; some of the snow drifts



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and winter conditions on higher grounds in our region can match any other part of UK.

The team's normal 3rd Sunday in the month exercise is not likely to guarantee winter conditions to practise in locally so we decided a weekend trip to the Cairngorms would improve the chances of winter training and benefit the whole team. The training group and committee agreed last year that a 2020 trip was needed as there was a growing number of new team members who have not used crampons and ice axes before or experienced bitter wind chills that require much stricter personal admin and care.

After a lot of logistics, kit, and training session planning in the months leading up to the 18th/19th January there was not much else left within the team's control. In that final week before going we were in the hands of weather gods to see what conditions would await our arrival. It has not been the best Scottish Winter so far this year. With limited snowfall and very high winds scouring the mountains during the week leading up to our trip leaving a thin covering of hard snowpack.

The instructors and a couple of team members had gone up a day early to check the local conditions and find the best areas to train in. The majority of the team headed up on the Friday in a minibus. Mobile 1 was used for a few team members and to take team technical kit for weekend.

The hostel in Aviemore provided a great evening base on Friday and Saturday for team members to take on a good meal, have an evening briefing from the instructors, and get a reasonable night sleep, even if some of the team turned out to be heavy snorers.

The previous week of strong winds did fortunately break for our arrival, which would make training more pleasant and easier to absorb. There had been a very light dusting of fresh snow when we woke up on Saturday morning, but the avalanche forecast was still low and no big accumulations in previous days.

The newer team members spent Saturday with one of the team's own Winter Mountain Leaders (Kim Jones), who was going to provide them with a packed day of crampon, ice axe, winter walking, ice axe arrest, navigation practise, route consideration. The experienced team members would have chance to learn from two Mountain Instructors (Mark and Ingrid), about group management, safety considerations in winter, and different winter anchor techniques. It was a long day for all with team members just getting back as dusk was coming in. Fortunately no one had any trips in crampons; the worst damage was probably to Marc's waterproof trousers after ripping them on his crampons just after stopping to take them off near end of the day.

The Sunday would now combine all the team together, to mix the groups up to perform some more rescue-based exercises and make use of team kit. The downside was that today we would carry in much more kit (mainlines, safety lines, ID's, paws, carabiners, deadman, slings) being carried up the mountain along with



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the Bell Stretcher, extra snow shovels, avalanche probes, transceivers and of course all our personal kit to survive a full winter day.

Mark and Ingrid led the sessions and allowed us all to experience the difficulties in trying to perform an avalanche search using probes, the speed benefits that transceivers offer when searching for buried people, how to build a 3-way anchor to lower or raise a stretcher.



During the afternoon we had all noticed the increasing wind speeds, and extra layers being pulled out of team member bags to stay warm and remain operationally efficient. The final challenge had been nicely served up by the weather gods for our departure of the mountain around 15:00 when the wind speed and gusts really started to strengthen. It certainly added an extra training element while trying to store and carry our kit safely back down the mountain. We were getting battered and pushed around with 80-90mph gusts, reported at the weather station when checked later that day. The bell stretcher might weigh 20kg but in strong those winds it can feel like a sail ready to knock anyone out of its way.

If you were a member of the public and had an unfortunate accident on Cairn Gorm this was the weekend to have it. Teesdale & Weardale Search and Mountain Rescue Team had a 20 person team, the Lake District teams had grouped 6 teams together and had around 60+ team members on their own training weekend, and we heard there was a team from Aberdeen training as well. We were not aware of any real callouts requiring assistance though which was probably for the best as it allowed all teams to focus on their training.



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Overall a great weekend of training and experience for the team.



Latest Recruits

Scott Bisset

Teesdale & Weardale Search & Mountain Rescue team now has two newly qualified search dogs; Tarn, a five-year-old tri-coloured Border Collie owned by team member Mike Needham, and Chief, a three-year-old red & white Border Collie owned by team member Tony High.

Tony was especially proud as he and Chief won 'The Lyons Bowl' for best dog team on their second dog (or subsequent dog). Tony previously won the Novice Shield with his first dog Isla. The Lyons Bowl was introduced to honour best dog team where the handler had previously had a dog. Tony is the only dog handler to have ever won both awards - a great achievement!

It takes two years of intensive training to get to the point where both dog and handler can be used to search for missing persons in the North East and around the country assisting other Rescue teams. The training starts with basic obedience to show that dog and handler have an understanding of their role, and to demonstrate control.

Dogs are then stock tested to ensure they ignore any livestock when searching, this must be passed before further training occurs.



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Over the ensuing months training is at least once a week, and one weekend per month, which can be anywhere in the country, though Wales, the Peak District and the Lake District are favourites.

The dogs are trained to pick up 'air scent' and follow it to its source to achieve their reward, usually nothing more than a simple toy or ball.

One of the final tests is the indication test which is how the dog will work during its searching career. The dog must find the casualty and then bark. It must then return to its handler and bark again. This is known as 'indicating' as it indicates that it has found something, it then leads its handler to the 'find'.

The dogs are not owned by the team but are treated as the handler's pet and are therefore willing volunteers, and like the rest of the team members receive no remuneration. All costs and time are at the handler's expense. That's dedication!



Mike and Tarn



Tony and Chief



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Team AGM

At the November AGM, this year's president, David Clarke, presented team members (from top left clockwise) Izzy De Santis, Des Lee, Marc Tomlinson, and David Bartles-Smith (DBS), with certificates to recognise their contribution to the Team.





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Team Callouts



November - December 2019

Date	Description
18.00 19/11/2019	The team were called to search for an elderly high-risk gentleman from Sherburn. The gentleman was found in one of our designated search sectors and the Team assisted with gaining access and treatment before handing over to NEAS.
16.44 15/12/2019	Assistance to elderly male and 2 police officers whose vehicles had gone off the road in snow and ice at Swinhope Head
19.00 21/12/2019	We were asked by Penrith MRT to assistance in the search for two missing walkers who had set off for High Cup Nick from the Cumbria side. We were assembling to search from Birkdale Farm to High Cup Nick, when the walkers were found.



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09.00 29/12/2019	We were called to assist Durham Police to search for a missing person whose car had been found in Stanhope. Nine team members assisted Durham Police and searched open and wooded areas in the Stanhope area.
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January - February 2020

09.00 05/01/2020	Two of the team dog handlers were training today with their dogs in Weardale when they noticed a gentleman who looked unwell slumped over the steering wheel of his car. They called the team and the ambulance service and started first aid. Durham Police were also informed of the incident. The gentleman was taken to hospital by the ambulance service.
16.22 11/01/2020	Team were contacted around 16.30 to say an there had been an actuation of a location device in the Cronkley Fell area of Teesdale. This turned out to be an accidental actuation but it could not be established the location of all of the party of 13. A Team vehicle was sent to Bowlees and further investigations made. All of the party eventually arrived at the car park.
09.00 26/01/2020	Called by Durham Police to search for an elderly male in the Chesterle- street area who was missing from his place of residence. As the search areas were being planned in readiness for the team, the gentleman was found by a member of the public.
14.00 01/02/2020	A kayaker capsized whilst paddling towards Cotherstone suffering injuries to the upper body. Due to the terrain and location, we along with NEAS and Coastguard helicopter managed to get the kayaker to a suitable location to be winched up to the helicopter.
02.00 05/02/2020	The team were called in the small hours of the morning in relation to a missing male somewhere on the outskirts of Bishop Auckland. The Team sent a 'phone find' message to allowing the missing man to send us his location however he did not respond. The missing male was found by the police while the Team were awaiting more information with which to plan a search.



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16.00 09/02/2020	The team were called to assist with locating a missing person who was involved in an RTC on the outskirts of Durham City. The missing person was located by Durham Police shortly after the initial call was made.
11.00 14/02/2020	The team were made aware of an injured walker on the Lanchester railway late this morning. We had one of our dog handlers in the area who went to assess the casualty and treat their injuries. Shortly after we arrived on scene, Durham County Council came to allow access for the ambulance and continued to help us extracting the casualty to an RV for NEAS.

Fundraising

A big thank you to everyone that donates money to the Team - without you we would not be able to operate.

As an example of the support that we receive, the picture below shows our Fundraising officer, Ben Lester, receiving a cheque from the Darlington Afternoon Trefoil Guild (Girl Guiding). The ladies had been collecting 20p's throughout the year, and had managed to raise £107.





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Stop Press! - Latest pictures

Action from the Team's February training exercise on Cotherstone Moor



Every exercise comes with a story attached to add realism. In this exercise a climber had ventured onto Cotherstone Moor to explore the many crags and outcrops. At one of these he had had an accident and it was up to the Team Search Manager to come up with a strategy to find and recover the missing person.

To complicate matters, just as the recovery from the first incident was coming to an end, there was an exercise call that a walker had fallen and injured himself. The what3words app was used to locate the walker; he was quickly found, treated and brought to safety.



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Associate Members

Thank you for your continued support of the Team.

Please feel free to contact me with suggestions regarding the newsletter, or possible events for the coming year.

Chris Roberts

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