



# Teesdale & Weardale Search & Mountain Rescue Team

## Newsletter - Summer 2021

A warm welcome to the Summer 2021 edition of the newsletter.

Summer has come, so the local villages are having their traditional scarecrow trails. In Cotherstone the Team featured in the Villains and Heroes theme. Heroes I'm sure!



### Introduction

Steve Owers - Team Leader

I would have hoped that since our last newsletter earlier in the year COVID would have been a distant memory but sadly not. Team members are still wearing full PPE when we deal with casualties or when we cannot maintain social distancing e.g., carrying a stretcher. I am really impressed with the way all Team members are dealing with the situation and just getting on and doing the job.

Like all charities we have seen a big drop in donations from collecting boxes and street collections. Can I thank all our Associate Members for continuing to support us with the annual subscription. If you have not managed to renew this year because of COVID don't worry you will still remain an Associate Member for 21/22. If it has just slipped your mind you can get in touch with our Associate Members Lead, Chris at [chris.roberts@twsmrt.org.uk](mailto:chris.roberts@twsmrt.org.uk)

I hope you are all keeping well, and you enjoy reading this Newsletter



## Teesdale & Weardale Search & Mountain Rescue Team

### High Skears Lead Mine Incident 3rd April 2021

Pete Bell - Deputy Team Leader

Steve Owers, Team Leader, received a phone call from County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service (CDDFRS) Control room saying they had received a phone call about an incident in High Skears mine involving three persons who may be trapped in a shaft.

Steve rang me as a dual member of TWSMRT and Cumbria Ore Mines Rescue unit (COMRU) and told me to go to the incident. I asked that he contact Paul who is a former team member and also a COMRU member who lives in Weardale and was slightly closer to the incident than me.

For background Skears mine is above Middleton in Teesdale and is a disused Lead mine, last worked in the 1940s, that is extensive and has an entrance portal at the valley top which is inter-connected with an entrance/exit portal in Low Skears mine at the valley bottom, a vertical distance of about 150m with lots of workings between these.

Before leaving I rang the COMRU Team Leader and asked that COMRU be called to the incident. Steve put TWSMRT on standby to assist in over-ground logistics if required.

Paul arrived about ten minutes before me, and to say this was a multi-agency job would be a mild understatement. There was Heli-med, ambulance service, Police, HART (Hazardous Area Response Team), and about six CDDFRS appliances. Paul had found the CDDFRS Incident Controller and was being briefed as I arrived.



We were told that one of the party had reported his dad and uncle trapped underground suspended on a rope. We were asked me to assess the scene and report back to the Incident Controller. We cleared this with our Controller, and we went into the mine. At this point I was confident I knew where the casualties would be located.

Figure 1 shows the location and the 'through route' to Low Skears, which I suspected was where the casualties were, CDDFRS had a hand drawn map at their over-ground Control location, which confirmed this location.



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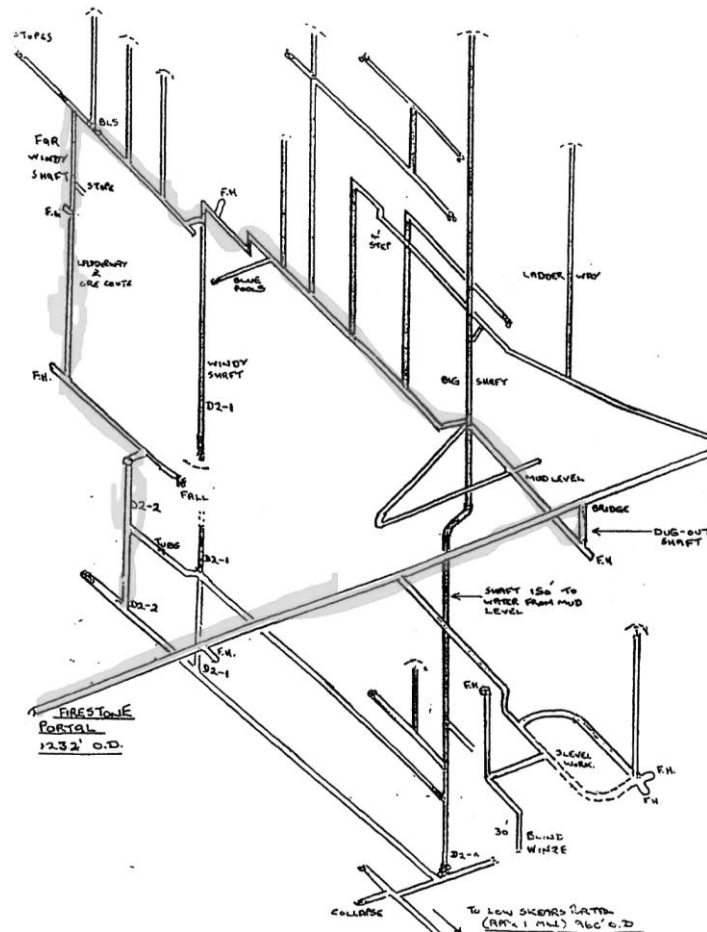


Fig 1. Firestone Level

As suspected, they were in the first vertical shaft at the start of the through route. This through-route is not commonly done and is a serious undertaking. The incident site was off the main 'Firestone' level of the mine, about 300m from the entrance portal then down laddered shafts at the end of a cramped level that meets the top of the first big shaft which starts the through route. Two 'casualties', the young lad and his uncle who had already been persuaded to ascend the rope back into the level, were there with 3 or 4 firefighters.

The fire-fighters briefed us that the two older persons had attempted to descend the shaft, but the casualty was still 16m down suspended on his rope, just above a slight dogleg in the shaft and unable to re-ascend. We made contact by shouting to him and established he was physically tired, and his legs were numb at this point he had been there for about 2.5 hours. We told the firemen that the best course of action would be to send two independent ropes down to him, clip him in and set up a haul system to bring him up the shaft and asked one of the fire-fighters to report this back to their Incident Controller.

The shaft was uninviting, there was loose ground in the walls above and below the level, and although it wasn't actively running we decided that the casualty needed close attention and assessment, so I abseiled down to him, taking the two haul ropes.

At the casualty, I attached the two haul ropes and ascended next to the casualty as he was being hauled to provide physical and moral support. Once he was back in the relative safety





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of the horizontal level, we gave him some oxygen and biscuits, after about 15 minutes we walked the casualty out of the mine.



Pete and Paul at the end of a very successful operation.

### Recruitment

Des Lee - Deputy Team Leader and Recruitment Lead

This year three recruits were successful in making the grade and have joined the Hill Team. Recruitment was made harder this year due to Covid. We had to put our thinking caps on to see how we could give potential recruits a flavour of what they were letting themselves in for. A 'MS Teams' video conference meeting came to the rescue. We held an informal meeting with 30 applicants where we ran a video which showed our base at Durham and the vehicles we operate. Our Team Leader, Steve Owers, gave an overview of what they should expect, including loads of reason why not to join, just to make sure candidates understood what they were letting themselves in for.

Then it was over to the Deputy Team Leaders, Peter & Des, who give an overview of Search management and the time commitment that is needed for a recruit to be able to pass an assessment in a year's time. Our Training Lead, Andy, gave them an overview of training session he organises, and how we train. The session was then open to questions and answers.

Candidates were then invited, if they were still interested, to complete an online navigation test; "a first for the Team". Only 20 completed the test, and only 12 were successful. Those 12 were interviewed over the internet and asked to attend a hill assessment. The hill assessment provided us with 6 new trainee members.

The recruitment process started with 30 applicants; by the time this was completed we had lost 24, and were left with 6. There are many reasons why this is the case. Primarily that the applicants did not realise exactly what the Team does, and the commitment that that entails.

We are very pleased to welcome those 6 new trainees to the Team.



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For those who do stick the course they all say the same thing, 'It's fantastic being part of the Team, I did not expect to learn as much and feel a more competent person at the end of the process'.



New trainee members joining in with training.

### Trainee Experience

Jamie Siddle - Hill team member

I promise not to make this all about Corona Virus, but it has affected the training for us as trainees, as well as for established team members. We were due to have our assessment at the end of 2020, but due to the risks associated with face-to-face training during the worst phases of the pandemic, we four trainees were behind in our schedule. That's not to say that we went into hibernation; we joined the callout list this time last year, we continued with online training, kept practicing our night navigation in covid-safe regulation-compliant ways, and were supported in learning by so many of the team members. Special thanks must go to Des and Andy for their tireless work to support us and mold/forged/beat us into shape.

Our journey started pre-virus in the usual manner with the introduction to the team, the requirements on us and a plan of our training. Within months our numbers began to dwindle, eventually leaving only four of the original nine to continue into 2020. We worked hard on navigation, and started to familiarise ourselves with the equipment, search skills, procedures, medical primary survey and the hill team personnel. Then there was lockdown 1.0. We were asked to join hill team members on callouts to help, as some members were shielding, self-isolating or working flat out in front-line healthcare and policing roles. Of course, we said yes – that was the exact reason we applied to join!

While standard training was impacted, we had the unique opportunity to learn on-the-job. We quickly learned how to work as part of a search team within the first few callouts – getting our hands dirty learning the skills as well as get to know team members better. For myself, it



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was the only social time I had during that first lockdown and I looked forward to every callout. From my perspective, being at callouts enabled me to see primary survey in practice, rather than a visualisation with a fake casualty. The nuance of interaction with the casualty by the care-giver was very illuminating; calmness, reassurance, humour and determination not to be distracted from the full primary survey. I'm not sure training "in the classroom" could ever do this justice and I'm very lucky to have experienced it.

Despite missing out on some standard parts of the course (through covid restrictions and self-isolation), I do feel that I have learned a huge number of skills through the training given. I originally decided to apply to join the team as I felt that I had some skills and motivation that could be used to help people on the fells. As it turns out, I had the motivation but not the skills! There has been so much to learn, right from the basics, that when I look back at my level of knowledge at the start, I am quite shocked at how unprepared I was. Everything from mechanical advantage in rope work, micro-navigation, medical, radio procedures, and a hundred things in between, has been patiently explained to us and we have had top class tuition from the team.

It has been an honour to be accepted into the team, after passing the assessment on 6<sup>th</sup> March. I can't wait to learn more skills and just get out there to help. As trainees we saw that, as individuals, we can only help by working as a team. In the same sense, we couldn't have accomplished our training without the time and effort of the rest of the team, and I'd just like to say thank you for all your time and effort. And I'd also like to thank the other trainees, too. We helped each other all the way through and had more than a few laughs in the process.

## Callouts

38 so far this year

Date	Description
11.30 09/01/2021	Team called to evacuate a male who has slipped on ice in the Bishop Middleham area and injured his leg. 13 team members helped with packaging the casualty, moving him to the team land rover and transferring him to a NEAS ambulance.
23.00 15/01/2021	The team were contacted by Durham Police to assist with the search of a high-risk missing person in the Wheatley Hill area. As the team were searching, the missing person made his way home, cold but uninjured. The team deployed 11 team members and 1 search dog.
15.00 11/02/2021	The team were contacted by Durham police to assist with the extraction of 3 motorists stranded in snow and ice. The team remained on standby whilst the police attempted to make contact with the motorists. The police managed to extract, and the team stood down.
11.32 14/03/2021	The team were called by North East Ambulance Service at 1130 today to assist with locating and treating an injured mountain biker at Hamsterley Forest. The injured person was located, treated by NEAS, and evacuated in a NEAS ambulance.
17.00 20/03/2021	The Team were asked to search for a despondent male seen on CCTV entering Wharleton park in Durham. The park, and in particular the surrounding search and wooded banks were searched by 3 dog teams. The missing male was located by the police as a direct result of team enquiries.





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15.30 31/03/2021	The team were called on Wednesday afternoon to help North East Ambulance Service to find, treat and evacuate a man with a shoulder injury near Hamsterley Forest. Some team members set up a simple rope system to protect the patient whilst team medics worked with NEAS HART paramedics to treat the patient. The patient was assisted to walk out of the incident site to a nearby ambulance for onward transport to hospital.
12.20 01/04/2021	Shortly after 12pm today the team were called out by NEAS to assist with a hiker who fell and injured herself in Castle Eden Dene. The team doctor alongside NEAS treated the patient and the team extracted her to the nearby ambulance.
09.00 05/04/2021	Assisting the police with a search consultation for a vulnerable missing person
14.00 07/04/2021	The Team were called to a male with a leg injury near a track in the High Pennines above Hamsterley Forest. The casualty's location was confirmed via SarLoc and the injured man was picked up by a police 4x4 and transported to a NEAS Ambulance as the Team assembled.
19.00 14/04/2021	At 19:00 the team were contacted by Durham Police to send a PhoneFind to a vulnerable missing person in Durham City.
03.50 15/04/2021	At 03:50 this morning the team were called out by Durham Police to assist with the search for a missing person in the Hawthorn Dene area. The team called in extra help from neighbouring teams and a total of 50 personnel deployed to search along with the coast guard. Unfortunately, the missing person was not located in our search area and police investigations continue.
00.41 18/04/2021	Assisting the police with a search consultation for a vulnerable missing person
12.45 24/04/2021	The Team were called by NEAS to help with the treatment and evacuation of a female with a lower leg injury near Hetton. The first team member on scene treated the injured lady while the Team arranged evacuation using our wheeled stretcher about one mile to the nearest road, where the patient was handed over to the NEAS ambulance.
10.32 25/04/2021	Team asked for advice from Police about a person missing near Cow Green Reservoir. No response from Team at this stage.
19.56 25/04/2021	Assisting the police with a search consultation for a vulnerable missing person.
09.00 26/04/2021	Assisted North East Ambulance Service with the recovery of a patient near Blanchland
12.00 30/04/2021	Just after lunch the Team were contacted by Durham & Darlington Fire & Rescue informing us of an incident at a disused mine at Middleton In Teesdale where two people were stuck in a shaft inside the abandoned lead mine. As part of a pre-prepared plan with Fire & Rescue we asked for the assistance of Cumbria Ore Mines Rescue Unit - COMRU. One member of the party was soon brought to the surface by Fire & Rescue. A COMRU member was lowered 15m down a shaft and assisted by members of Fire & Rescue Rope Rescue team and a HART (Hazardous Area Response Team) paramedic, from North East Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust, raised the casualty to the top of the shaft. After being medically checked, the casualty was assisted out of the level to the surface.
17.15 01/05/2021	Assisting the police with a search consultation for a vulnerable missing person.



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20.00 02/05/2021	Assisting the police with a search consultation for a vulnerable missing person.
01.30 04/05/2021	We were contacted by Durham Police at 01:30 to assist with a search for a vulnerable person in the Deerness Valley Woodland area. As the Team were starting to deploy to the location the missing person was located safe and well and the Team stood down.
00.30 05/05/2021	Assisting the police with a search consultation for a vulnerable missing person.
09.10 07/05/2021	Assisting the police with a search consultation for a vulnerable missing person
09.00 10/05/2021	Assisting the police with a search consultation for a vulnerable missing person
23.30 14/05/2021	Team called to assist NEAS and DDFRS to rescue a male who had slipped in the vicinity of Hownsgill late on a Friday evening. Team stood down shortly after arriving on scene when no longer required.
13.00 16/05/2021	The team were called out by NEAS shortly after 1pm to assist with a lady who had slipped whilst walking injuring her ankle. The team treated the casualty before extracting her to a nearby ambulance.
23.10 23/05/2021	At 11pm the Team were called out by Durham Constabulary to assist with the search for 3 hikers who were overdue. The 3 ladies set off from Middleton-In-Teesdale in the morning and were due home by 5pm. Team members and search dogs searched through the night along the hikers planned route, in driving rain and wind. The ladies had managed to take shelter in a remote barn overnight due to one of the hikers injuring her ankle. Thankfully as a search group were finishing their sectors, the missing hikers were located. Swaledale Mountain Rescue Team, Cleveland Mountain Rescue Team, Royal Air Force Mountain Rescue Service and Mountain Rescue Search Dogs England were also in the process of deploying to assist with the search when the ladies were found.
13.10 30/05/2021	Team called at 13.10 by NEAS Control to an ambulance assist for an elderly lady who had fallen and injured her hip on the north side of Burnhope Reservoir. 8 Team members attended, treated the casualty, and transported her to the RV at the car park where she was handed over to NEAS Ambulance.
18.31 30/05/2021	Request for assistance from Kirkby Stephen MRT in search for missing walker believed to be on Mickle Fell. Initially involving TWSMRT search managers then Team called out just before missing walker located.
22.00 31/05/2021	Assisting the police with a search consultation for a vulnerable missing person
19.00 07/06/2021	The Team were called by Durham Police to search for a vulnerable male missing from his home in Stanley. A number of local wooded areas were identified and soon after searching commenced a body was found by one of the 5 search dogs deployed by the Team.
20.20 12/06/2021	The team were called to assist North East Ambulance Service to transport an incapacitated male on the outskirts of Durham. Team members assisted NEAS HART team with the extraction of the patient to a NEAS vehicle.
19.30 29/06/2021	The Team were called by NEAS to assist with the evacuation of a female with an ankle injury near the River Derwent. The lady was wheeled on a team stretcher about half a mile to the ambulance.





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22.30 29/06/2021	Assisting the police with a search consultation for a vulnerable missing person
15.00 01/07/2021	The Team were called by NEAS to rescue a mountain biker who'd crashed in Hamsterley Forest injuring his head and shoulder. The team packaged the man and carried him about 200m to the NEAS ambulance.
13.45 04/08/2021	The team was called out this afternoon to assist North East Ambulance Service with an injured walker near High Force in Teesdale. 7 Team members used the Team stretcher to transport the casualty 300m to the road where she was handed over to a County Ambulance
23.30 13/08/2021	The Team were called by Durham Police to assist in locating and rescuing two women who had become stuck at the bottom Castle Eden Dene after an evening walk in the area. Two team members made their way to the women via a nearby deer track and assisted them to safety.
11.30 14/08/2021	The team were alerted by North East Ambulance Service to a mountain biker who had taken unwell at Hamsterley Forest on one of the maintained trails. The team deployed immediately and provided casualty care alongside our colleagues in the Hamsterley Forest - Forestry England, NEAS, Great North Air Ambulance Service and Durham Constabulary. Sadly, despite the efforts of all concerned the patient passed away.
13.11 23/08/2021	The Team was called out today by North East Ambulance Service to a report of a female fallen off a bike in Hamsterley Forest possible head injury. On arrival of a Team member, it was apparent the injury was not a serious as suspected. Minor treatment was given, and the lady was checked over by an ambulance crew. The Team was stood down.

### Casualty evacuations



**Castle Eden Dene**



**Hamsterley Forest**



# Teesdale & Weardale Search & Mountain Rescue Team

## Team News

Scott Bisset - Press & PR Lead

The Team has had a relatively busy period with the usual mix of calls for assistance from the Police, the North East Ambulance Service (NEAS) and HART (Hazardous Area Response Team). Jobs include two vulnerable missing from home, a couple of injured walkers, two calls for assistance to locate and evacuate mountain bikers from Hamsterley forest, and a request to locate and rescue two females who had become lost and 'crag fast' on a steep slope in Castle Eden Dene! Despite the best efforts from all the emergency services working together, the Team has had to deal with two fatalities in the last three months. Our sympathies go to anyone who may have been affected by these.

Training goes on despite difficulties put in our way by ongoing Covid restrictions and although this is getting easier, finding new and safer locations for exercises has been trying. Training of new recruits is going well with a good mix of ages, genders and talents joining the team in the last two years.

Vehicle lead, Des is still making improvements to vehicles and kit despite still recovering from Long Covid and our Equipment Lead, Eric has now supplied us with a second stretcher wheel for Mobile 1.







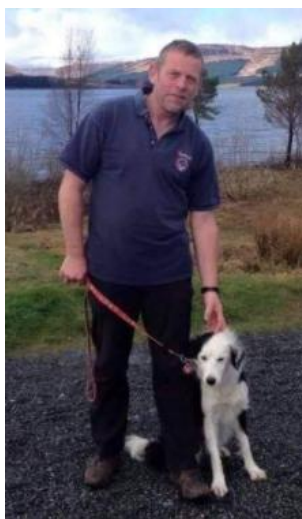
## Teesdale & Weardale Search & Mountain Rescue Team

### Dog Des

March saw a milestone for one of our Operational Team Members and Senior Dog Handler Des Toward....

Des Joined the Team as a Youth Team member some 42 years ago, and this year marks his 40th year on the Team. It's truly a remarkable achievement giving many hours of support to the local community and further afield with Mountain Rescue Search Dogs England, now onto his 4th Search Dog.

Thanks for all you have done and continued to do 'Dog Des', hopefully you'll continue to volunteer with us for many more years to come!







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### Fundraising - 3 Peaks

For a number of years now Durham University students have been raising money for the Team by completing the national 3 peaks challenge. The challenge is to climb Ben Nevis, Scafell Pike and Snowdon within 15 hours of climbing time. The university have a charities organisation, DUCK (Durham Universities Charity Kommittee), which manages and liaises with the Team for this event.

When the Team first became beneficiaries of this event the only involvement was to help by providing minibus drivers. As the years have gone by DUCK and the Team have looked closely at the management of the event to make sure of its success and safety. To that end for the past couple of years the Team has provided not only drivers but hill leaders. Supporting the event is clearly a big commitment by members, but of significant financial benefit to the Team. Last year, not surprisingly, the event had to be cancelled, however this year the event did take place with two groups of students taking on the challenge, as evidenced by the following pictures taken by Michael Smith, one of the leaders.



Arriving in Fort William ready for the challenge ahead.



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Conditions on the Ben were far from perfect, but the groups were determined to push on to the summit.



Both groups at the top of Ben Nevis to claim their first peak.





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Scafell Pike was completed in good time. The weather once again was not playing nice, but it did not dent the enthusiasm of the group.



At the summit of a very wet Snowdon to finish the final peak. Fantastic effort by the group and still plenty of smiles despite the rain.





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Descending off Snowdon, making our way down the Miners Track with the finish now in sight and the end of a successful challenge.

To date this year's event has raised £10,937 + £1797 in gift aid.

A huge thanks to DUCK, the students who have raised the money, and the team members who have given their time to lead on the hills or drive the minibuses.

The first TWSMRT/DUCK 3 Peaks was 2006... there were also couple of years with 5 peaks and 6 years of Great Glen trips.

Although we do not have the exact figure our relationship with DUCK must have raised in the order of £100,000.

An outstanding contribution

In addition, one of the leaders, and trainee member, Jane Ashcroft raised £2,885 + £561 in gift aid. Jane wrote a blog to support her fund-raising effort, which can be seen at [Wild PlacesExploring the wild places of the UK and Europe \(wild-places.org\)](http://WildPlacesExploringthewildplacesoftheUKandEurope(wild-places.org)) (3 Peaks)



## Teesdale & Weardale Search & Mountain Rescue Team

### What's it like to be a search and mountain rescue trainee?

**Our newest recruits tell us about their experiences.**

Recruited virtually in February, this year's trainee cohort of six was selected from a larger group of applicants than usual. Interest from potential volunteers came in from people who had perhaps found themselves with more free time due to lockdown, or read some of the national press where mountain rescue teams had featured more prominently than usual.

Dan, Russ, Jane, Miles, Josh and Jodie come from a diverse set of backgrounds – business owners, a geologist, a project engineer, a comms manager – all with different skillsets that they hope to put to good use in callouts. They all had their own personal reasons for wanting to join the team – from a love of the outdoors, to working in a team and having that sense of belonging, to wanting to set an example to their children or simply give back to the community.

The training, led by Des Lee and Andy Botrill with an enthusiastic group of trainers from the existing team, has been varied and always with the aim of reaching a high standard. The journey trainees go on from day one in the team is quite something – even after all of the talks given throughout the recruitment process expectation vs reality can be quite different things. Jane said that the joy of being accepted as a trainee was immediately followed by wondering what she'd been let in for. Jodie agreed – “I told Steve [Owers] I was a hard and enthusiastic worker but I wasn't sure that would be enough – I knew I had a lot to learn right from the start.”

Dan told us, “Although I knew they were technical, the range of skills they cover is immense – the level of navigation is second to none, and working to such accuracy is the learning curve I enjoy the most.”

Navigation skills do indeed feature prominently, with trainees needing to develop strong enough skills to find their way out of a dark spot on the moors with nothing but a map, compass and headtorch.

Technical rope rescue work has tied them up in knots trying to remember which pieces of equipment can hold the correct weight for any given rescue scenario. And the group has learned just how different rope skills in mountain rescue are compared to sport climbing skills. An experienced climber, Miles noted that “learning the technical rope rescue skills and how these differ from climbing ropework has been extremely eye-opening! The innuendos in the rope sessions has been the funniest bit for me – they just keep coming.” Jane, another climbing enthusiast said that the training had really pushed her out of her comfort zone.

Radio skills require them to be able to operate on at least two different channels using different types of radio and chattering fluently in the phonetic alphabet (apparently “J for Jodie” doesn't quite cut it!). Medical training – with the ability to conduct a high quality ‘primary survey’ on a casualty – requires a clear head, confidence in your own knowledge as well as the team around you and a good bedside manner with the patient (or the 50kg dummy!).

The group have also been introduced to the team's search dogs – probably the most finely tuned and technical pieces of kit of all – and were wowed by how quickly they could find a casualty hidden completely from sight in the Pennines.

In the melee of all of this, the trainees have pulled together to practice outside of the official team sessions and help each other learn. Although training to be in the team is a serious



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business, the jokes and banter that have emerged have bonded the team together too – Dan said “the funniest bit for me is how everyone always expects me to carry food and that my backpack will mostly be food. Along with the essential rescue Kit Kat too – oops, I meant kit. I swear!”

So has being a trainee lived up to expectations? Russ eloquently nailed it – “It’s everything and nothing like I expected. I had no idea about the medical and technical capabilities of the MR teams or the level to which even new members are trained.”

Watch this space for more from these six in the future as they work towards becoming fully fledged team members!

### Fundraising update

Holly Story - Fundraising Officer

We have had some brilliant support from individuals who are raising funds for the team through sponsored events, including Gemma Siddle who is taking on a dare-devil 'wing walk'. This was due to take place in July but had to be postponed because of stormy weather, so it is now scheduled for 30th August and we wish Gemma all the very best on the day. If you would like to donate to support Gemma and the Team, please visit: <https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/gemmasiddle>

We have two street collections planned towards the end of the year. The first will be in Darlington in late November (date tbc) and the second will be in Durham on Saturday 18th of December. Please get in touch if you would like to help out at either event, it would be very much appreciated.

### Acknowledgements

Our off-road vehicles provide a very important part of the Team's equipment. Without proper driver training these vehicles would not be able to be used effectively.

For a number of years Graeme Gill of Deepdale 4x4 has provided driver training for the Team drivers. Not only that, but he has allowed the Team to use his off-road training facilities for practise free of charge. Thank you, Graeme, for your continued support.





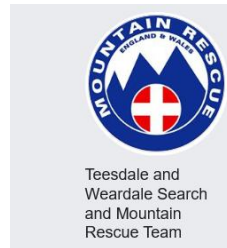


## Teesdale & Weardale Search & Mountain Rescue Team

### Support Team Members

Thanks to Alan and Lesley for their continued work on managing the collection tins, and for Jeanette on her support with equipment tidying, and her dogsbodying.

### Follow the Team on Facebook



### 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 (Support Team Lead)**  
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