



Teesdale & Weardale Search & Mountain Rescue Team

Newsletter - New Year 2023

Welcome to the 2023 New Year edition of the newsletter. Wishing you all a happy and prosperous New Year.

Chris Roberts

Team Leader's message

Steve Owers (Team Leader)

Happy New Year to you all.

2022 was our busiest year for some time with 53 call outs. A number of these occurred as a result of Storm Arwen. I was extremely proud of the team for the way they carried out a number of snow related rescues on the Friday night and Saturday then spending three days later in the week carrying out welfare checks in the more remote parts of Weardale and Teesdale to support the local community.

In October we sadly lost a much liked and experienced Team member, Marc Tomlinson. Marc, who had been in the Team for 14 years, sadly died on a wild camping trip in Scotland leaving a wife, two young sons and an older son. We were able to say our goodbyes to Marc at his funeral attended by over 40 past and present team members.

We also recently lost another team member, Sam, the search dog belonging to Karen Fisher. Sam made a number of finds for us as well as attending many call outs.

With increasing pressure on all our statutory services, we are working closely with our police, fire and ambulance services so they can make best use of our resources. This is also putting added pressure on Team members who continue to support the community as volunteer Mountain Rescue Team members

Looking forward into 2023 we have a full programme of training events organised including a trip to Scotland to carry out winter skills training.

Can I take this opportunity to thank everyone who has supported us in any way during 2022. Without this support we would not be able to provide the service we do.

Steve Owers
Team Leader



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Introducing our new Team President

Graeme Gill (TWSMRT President)



President of Teesdale and Weardale Search and Mountain Rescue Team has quite a ring to it and a role that came as quite a surprise when Steve rang me with the question “would I be prepared to take on the role”. I was honoured and once assured that the job was not too “onerous” happily accepted.

For those that don't know me I thought a quick resume of how I got to this point in life would be worthwhile. I was born on a Teesdale dairy farm in the late fifties (very late) and went to school at Bowes followed by the Barnard Castle School. When I left with O levels that suggested a career in nuclear physics was not on the cards, I joined my father working on the farm. I married Ann in the early eighties and have two children, both now happily grown up and settled in their careers.

The farm has a section of land that has never been productive and in the late nineties I set up Deepdale Off Road as a means of using this area more productively by training drivers to operate 4x4 vehicles safely. I seem to remember at the very start having TWSMRT on the course in a white 90, my first contact with people who gave up their free time for nothing and risked their lives going out in weather most sensible people try to avoid. The business grew quickly and became a full-time job with the farm been run by tenants though I get involved whenever possible to maintain my link to my routes.

Mountain Rescue training has become a solid part of my business with numerous teams coming in for training and I have tried to help support them as much as possible over the years. I never cease to be amazed at the commitment shown by team members and admire all those who commit to the sacrifices that inevitably have to be made.

I would like to think my time in this role can be productive and I am not just someone to wheel out at AGMs so please ask if I can help in any way as the new members start to follow in the footsteps of those who built the team to what it is today.



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Exercise Triple Hammer 21st August 2022

Pete Bell (Search Management Lead)

The background leading to this exercise goes back to an underground incident in a disused Teesdale lead mine at the back end of 2021. A party of three had decided to do the 'through trip' entering the mine portal at the valley top and exiting in the valley bottom. This is an arduous and difficult route and commences with the descent of a vertical 150-foot shaft, which has a dogleg at about 50 feet. One of the group descended about 40 feet and came to the end of his rope, fortunately he had put a knot in it which prevented him abseiling off the end of the rope. He unfortunately had no ascending equipment with him to re-ascend the rope and consequently was stuck hanging in his harness. Another of the group left the mine and raised the alarm, calling Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue (CDDFRS), who called the Team. A team member and an ex-team member, who are members of Cumbria Ore Mines Rescue Unit (COMRU), were asked to assess the situation. Following the assessment they effected a rescue, aided by two fire-fighters from CDDFRS, as there were serious concerns for the casualty's physical condition as he had been hanging in his harness for over two hours.

This incident resulted in a discussion between CDDFRS and TWSMRT as to who has the necessary expertise to conduct underground rescue in County Durham. As a result of this TWSMRT were tasked with arranging a multi-agency exercise to allow CDDFRS to observe the expertise in underground rescue available from COMRU, and Swale MRT, and the overground incident management capability of TWSMRT to support the incident.

As a member of TWSMRT, COMRU, and Swale MRT underground caver's list, I volunteered to make the exercise happen. Exercise Triple Hammer was born.

TWSMRT were invited to act as the over-ground main Control and Command. COMRU and Swale were to provide over-ground liaison with TWSMRT, and the underground expertise and resource required to effect the rescue.

CDDFRS were invited and sent a senior Fire Officer as an observer.

The exercise was designed around the following scenario.

Four mine explorers were overdue and one of their wives had rung CDDFRS control to report this. She also gave their names, car registration, and that they were going to the mine then splitting up into two pairs. One pair were going to find some ladders to access the upper levels and the other pair were going to explore east running levels after a bridge. She provided a sketch map of the way to the ladders.

CDDFRS rang the TWSMRT duty controller, who called out the Team, and also alerted COMRU and Swale through the sarccall system.

The teams and their over-ground controllers duly arrived and were briefed by TWSMRT. COMRU were allocated the two missing who were going to the ladders, and Swale the two exploring the East levels.



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The over-ground controllers briefed their underground leaders who in turn briefed their parties and allocated jobs. As this was a training exercise there was some mixing of underground team members to aid learning.

At one point in the exercise all available underground team members were being utilised, and a discussion was held with the over-ground incident manager to put additional underground resources from Cave Rescue Organisation (CRO) and Upper Wharfedale Fell Rescue Association (UWFRA) on standby in case further manpower was required.

After searching Swale found their casualties. One had no injuries and was walked out under supervision, the other had a simulated spinal injury requiring immobilisation and stretcher evacuation. This was from a difficult location; they were at the bottom of a small shaft.

COMRU had to travel further into the mine, and after a search found their casualties at the top of the ladders that access the mine high level. One casualty was uninjured, and he was walked out with supervision. The other casualty was assessed as having a simulated dislocated kneecap locking his knee at a 100-degree angle, which couldn't be put back in place at his location.

Extractions in both cases were difficult due to natural mine hazards such as tube crawls, squeezes, narrow passages and uneven floors.

Both casualties were extracted in good time and the exercise concluded with a 'hot' debrief.

A further big thanks to the two local farmers who allowed us access to their land for the exercise and parking, and to the gentleman in the adjacent house who provided his plans of the mine and allowed me to photograph them.



Bringing the casualty down the ladders



Stretcher and wheel down a passage



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Manhandling the stretcher through the tube



The other casualty in a confined space stretcher

A year as a Mountain Rescue trainee

Jane Ashcroft (Publicity Lead)



I spent Saturday evening high up on the moors of the North Pennines in driving rain and strong winds trying to find small features in the dark using only a map and compass. There were no paths to follow, so we waded through knee deep heather, bogs and streams hoping that after pacing 800m on a compass bearing a small pond or grouse butt would miraculously appear out of the dark. This was the culmination of 10 months of training, our final assessment which we needed to pass in order to become hill team members of Teesdale & Weardale Search & Mountain Rescue Team

It's been some journey. Eight of us started off as trainees last April, just after the second lockdown eased. Two women and six men. It's needed a lot of time and commitment with most Wednesday evenings and at least one Sunday a month being taken up with training and then additional time spent practicing on our own. To give an idea of the commitment, in the 10



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months up to my assessment I attended 42 formal Team sessions totaling 183 hours. That's just over 26 full days of formal training. In addition, I've spent many more hours practicing night nav, knots and casualty care, alone and with the other trainees.

The training has been superb. As well as learning how to navigate at night on the moors of the North Pennines we've learnt about casualty care, ropework, vehicles, equipment, radios, and search techniques. We learnt how to put together the different types of stretchers and the stretcher wheel and how to strip down the vehicles and load the stretchers into them. We learnt basic life support and a primary survey and secondary survey, how to set up the oxygen and Entonox bottles and how to put on traction splints, vacuum splints and pelvic binders. We've done online helicopter training and learned how the search dogs are used. We've set up 3-to-1 pulley systems and 5-to-1 systems and 9-to-1 systems and single line systems and double line systems. We've abseiled off towers and been hoisted up buildings attached to the stretcher. We've bivvied out in November high up on the moors under a starry sky, we've been eaten by midges in June, and we've been soaked to the skin by winter rain.

We've bonded together extremely well as a trainee group and have become good friends. We've supported each other through the tough times and the good times, we've had moments of despair and lots of laughter. It's not always been easy, and we've all had a crisis of confidence at some point. For me it was the off-road vehicle session when I was surrounded by men talking knowledgeably about diff locks and winches and I started to think I was in completely the wrong place. But You Tube has videos on everything and by the end of the following day I could talk as knowledgeably as the next person about diff locks..... We've been pushed out of our comfort zones and put under pressure, just like we'd be on a call out and our resilience and confidence has grown throughout the year.

We've kept up the training commitment despite having significant changes going on in our personal lives. New babies, new jobs, moving house, ill partners and Covid has affected us all. It says a lot about the resilience and character of the individual trainees that they didn't give up when the going got tough.

The other Team members have without exception been patient, helpful and supportive throughout our time as trainees. They are a great bunch of people, friendly and keen to help and there's a great pride in belonging to the Team. They are all volunteers; they often have full time jobs and families and yet they always give up their time willingly.



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We were put on the call out list early in September with the proviso that we weren't to attend any nighttime callouts until we had passed our night navigation assessment. We also weren't permitted to attend callouts in exceptionally bad weather. The first call out was nerve wracking – as my daughter kept reminding me, you only have one first call out. But it was fine, you do what you are trained to do, and you don't dwell too much on it afterwards. One of the great things about our Team is the variety in the call outs. As well as the traditional fell rescue, we may be helping the ambulance service transport a patient from a remote property, helping an injured mountain biker at Hamsterley Forest, helping the police search for a missing person, assisting drivers trapped in the snow on the A66 or helping Northern PowerGrid carry out welfare checks on remote properties in power cuts. There were 64 callouts in 2021, up from 58 the previous year. Never a dull moment.

I'm often asked about the Team from a female perspective. It is a male dominated Team – out of 40 odd hill team members, only 5 are female, but with the best will in the world there will never be many women who enjoy wandering round the moors in the dark and rain. You do need to be physically strong, although with the invention of the stretcher wheel long stretcher carry outs are not needed as much as they used to be. You also need to be quite technically minded to understand how to put the equipment together and set up the ropework. But as long as you fit in and have the required skills then it really doesn't matter who you are, and I've never been treated any differently to the male trainees.

Why do I do it? Lots of reasons. I've spent my life in the outdoors, and I enjoy putting my skills and knowledge to some use rather than just for personal enjoyment. I enjoy helping people and focusing on others instead of on myself. I enjoy learning new skills and challenging myself. I enjoy having a reason to stay fit and strong. I enjoy the variety of the training and the callouts, of never knowing when the next callout will be or what it will involve. Most of all I enjoy being part of a team of like-minded individuals and finally feeling like I belong somewhere.



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I passed the assessment on Saturday night but my “career” with the Mountain Rescue is only just beginning. I’m acutely aware of how inexperienced I am and how much there is still to learn. I need to get a lot of callouts under my belt to build up that experience and there is a lot more training to be done. I’ve signed up for my Casualty Care exam which is the next level of medical training. There will be driver training before I’m allowed to drive any of the vehicles. I’d love to do more ropework. But just for a few days I’m going to relax and allow myself to feel proud that I am now part of the Mountain Rescue.

Team Callouts (September – December 2022)

Date	Callout number	Description
08.00 17/12/2022	46	The Canoe Team searched about 27km of the River Tees downstream from Broken Scar in Darlington, as a follow up to the previous search in November. After over 6 hours searching a body was spotted in the river which was subsequently identified as the missing male from Darlington.
00.41 02/12/2022	45	Team called to assist with the evacuation of casualty in the vicinity of Hownsgill.
01.40 18/11/2022	44	The Team was called in the small hours to search for a man seen entering the water in Durham City. Shortly after standing down the man was located safe and well.
09.00 11/11/2022	43	The Canoe Team were deployed to follow up on the dog searches of the previous evening and searched from Broken Scar about 7km downstream as far as Croft on Tees. Nothing was found.
17.30 10/11/2022	42	The Team was called about 17:30 after the car of a missing male in his early 70s was found at Broken Scar Picnic site near Darlington. The Team deployed 3 search dogs to search the river side and nearby woodland. The team searched late into the evening. While nothing was found but a number of areas were highlighted for subsequent searching in daylight.



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09.00 05/11/2022	41	The team were called out by Durham Police for the assistance with searching for a missing lady, last thought to be in the Gainford area. The team searched woodland, farmland and tracks in that area but unfortunately nothing was found. The police are continuing with their investigation.
17.30 24/10/2022	40	Yesterday evening 15 Team members assisted the Police in the recovery of a body from a steep side wooded valley near Crag Head Stanley.
09.00 23/10/2022	39	18 Team members and a search dog spent 6 hours today searching Stanley Woods, Stanley, Co. Durham for a gentleman who had been missing for some time. Searching at times was difficult with steep ground, not helped by heavy rain in the afternoon. Unfortunately, we were unable to locate the gentleman.
14.30 22/10/2022	38	The team was called out by NEAS to assist with the extrication of a lady who has fallen, injuring her back whilst out walking. The team extricated the patient safely to the ambulance.
11.30 15/10/2022	37	The team were contacted by Durham Police at 1130 to assist with an injured young mountain biker in Hamsterley Forest. Team members arrived at the scene as the NEAS ambulance arrived and assisted in the transfer of the casualty to the NEAS vehicle.
19.55 24/09/2022	36	The team were called to look for a group of 2 adults and a young child who became lost whilst trying to walk around Cow Green reservoir when darkness arrived.
02.00 15/09/2022	35	Team called in the early hours of the morning to assist with a search for a vulnerable male in his 40s missing in the Kepier Woods area. The Hill Team deployed at first light and started searching the woodland. The Canoe Team was preparing to deploy to search the River Wear and a dog was on standby to deploy from Northumberland when the missing man was found by the Team.





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60 4 60 - A dogsbody's year

Jeanette Hutchinson

Last year one of regular dogsbodies was set a challenge by her dogsbody buddy Body Claire. So as of December 20th, 2021, Body Jeanette had a number of things to complete before her 60th birthday on 20th December 2022!

The list of things included some fun things and some things that were tough or gave something to the community.

As you would expect Dogsbodying featured high on the list and the challenge was to be found on 60 occasions by a dog team. Jeanette was actually able to attend 40 training sessions and was found 70 times during the course of the year! This equates to approximately 120 volunteering hours, a huge commitment.



This is Search Dog Wisp on an unusually pleasant training session in Weardale earlier in the year!



As well as Dogsbodies activity Body Jeanette was challenged to cycle 100 miles from Berwick to Newcastle; eat 60 pizzas; Litter pick 60 times in her village of Low Etherley; swim 60 lengths in local swimming pools; drink 60 different types of craft beer; do 60 yoga poses in a session; get 60 people to donate to a local food bank; complete a Mountain Marathon and the biggest but most rewarding challenge complete 60 trig points in the 12 months!

Body Jeanette managed to do all of this including bagging the National 3 peaks in the process with the support of Body Claire and encouragement from our team of dog handlers.

Ben Nevis with Body Claire in June!
Always grim!



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Start of Saunders Mountain Marathon... the fitness required to do this was honed in upper Weardale during winter training with the dog team in dark and often atrocious conditions when carrying lots of kit and working as a team (*body, handler, dog*).



Fantastic Sunset on Snowdon followed by an overnight Bivvy just for the thrill! The kit provided by the Team for our regular dogsbodies training stood the test of a sub-zero experience high in Snowdonia. Body Jeanette and Claire are well equipped thanks to the Team with Keela jackets and thermal wear including socks and base layers.



Just 1 of the 60 beers... this was apparently the easiest part of the challenge! Dog Des was pretty impressed with this level of commitment!



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One of the 60 yoga poses! Doing yoga isn't compulsory to be a dogsbody but you do need a reasonable level of fitness and resilience to be out on the hill for a few hours in poor weather.



The final Trig point... Skiddaw in fantastic mountain conditions on 9th December. all done with a week to spare!

A very satisfying year, which was tough and enjoyable! The dog team and dogsbodies train on a regular basis for something with the potential to be very serious, but we do try and have a bit of fun along the way, like celebrating birthdays and St Patrick's Day. We would love for more people to join us!

Without the time and commitment of our dogsbodies we would not have a great dog team, if anyone is interested in joining us out on the hills contact Des Toward, you will be made very welcome, and instruction and kit can be provided.



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A remarkable search

John Little (Deputy Team Leader / Canoe Team Lead)

In November 2022 a man went missing from Darlington and his car was found later that day at Broken Scar picnic site next to the river Tees. The Team was called out that evening and three of the Team's search dogs tasked to search the riverbanks and surrounding areas. While there were a number of indications from the dogs along the riverbanks nothing was found and the search was stood down for the evening (*no emergency service will commit rescuers into a flooded river at night, hours into a search when there's nothing to be seen above the waterline*). The next day the Fire Service and the TWSMRT Canoe Team searched the river with the Fire Service focusing on the areas where the dogs had indicated and the Canoe Team searching downstream for about 6km from Broken Scar. At this point the search was stood down to await further investigation by the Police.



We know from experience that finding someone in a river is always very difficult – back in November the Tees had plenty of water coming down it and had very poor visibility. Divers and in water search teams can be brought in but can only search small areas. We also have plenty of experience of bodies in the lower Tees being found at The Barrage in Stockton a number of months after disappearing. With this in mind, and conscious of the weather conditions, the Canoe Team set off to search the river again at 9am on Saturday the 17th December.



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You may recall, this was towards the end of the fortnight of bitterly icy weather we had in December 2022 – the air temperature was still just below freezing, there were huge sheets of ice on the surface of the surface of the river and pancakes of ice floating downstream alongside the canoes. The recent weather had also left the water levels quite low for December – this is usually an advantage on a river search but when in a canoe you do sometimes have to jump out into the freezing water and push your boat down in the shallows.

The Canoe Team were also supported by Dave in the Control vehicle – we decided to use that vehicle because it offers much better welfare facilities for looking after Team members – including a heated cab and a water boiler. At about 15:30 with the sun already below the horizon and darkness rapidly drawing in and about 27km downstream (*nearly 12km as the crow flies*) and not far from Girsby the Canoe Team found who they had been looking for under a tree near the right-hand bank.

These distances are probably the greatest ever effectively searched by the Team and testament yet again to the effectiveness of the Canoe Team and the Team's amazing volunteers. For context, a typical missing person search may initially focus on areas about 1km from the last known position, expanding to 2km in due course and maybe hitting 4km in a particular direction if there's a strong attraction to that area. Also, around 80% of despondent missing persons are found within 5.4km (*and you can be pretty confident the other 20% aren't usually found by the formal search effort*).

Unfortunately, even after 27km in freezing conditions the challenges didn't end – iced up and very steep access tracks, police concerns about responsibility (*the south bank of the Tees, where the find was made, is part of Cleveland Constabulary's area*) and by the time any other resources were on scene it was far too dark to paddle out, so the canoes also had to be extracted across a field – big thanks to the local farmer for his help with that one!

We hope the find brought closure and certainty to the family and friends.

Fundraising

Sarah Hall (Fund raising Officer)

We have had a great year for fundraising in 2022.

We secured 7 spaces for the Great North Run last year which was a great success. We have now secured places for the Great North Run 2023 and would love to hear from anyone wanting to run the race and fundraise for the Team.

We held a street collection in September in Darlington raising £650 and a further street collection in December in Durham raising £1,085. Thank you to all who gave up their time and attended the street collections.



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We will be holding 3 street collections next year; Barnard Castle in May, Darlington in September and Durham in December (dates to be confirmed). If any of the associate members would like to come along and help at any of the collections, please get in touch with me on fundraising@twsmrt.org.uk.



25th June 2023 - Open Garden Fundraiser

Three gardens in Old Quarrington near Durham are again opening their garden gates to raise funds for the Nation Gardens Scheme charity. Like last year the profits from the refreshments will be going to TWSMRT, but we need some help! 2022 was a bumper year for the gardens with over 300 visitors and raising £850 for the rescue team. We want to raise even more in 2023 but there are a number of areas where extra help is required:

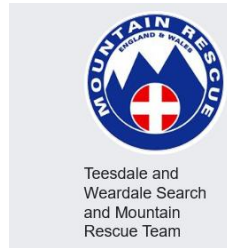
- Baking cakes - donations of delicious homemade cakes are very gratefully received.
- Parking and Traffic - we have to get lots of cars up and down a single-track road and park in our field.
- Serving refreshments - up to 300 rounds of Tea and cake.
- Washing up - 300 cups and plates all have to be washed!
- Craft Items - donations of any craft items that can be sold on the Team's behalf.
- Plants - Contributions to the plant stall are also gratefully received.

As you can see there's a lot going on and we're particularly keen for TWSMRT supporters to help pick up some of the load! If you think you might be able to assist, or to discuss options, please do contact john.little@twsmrt.org.uk



Teesdale & Weardale Search & Mountain Rescue Team

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.

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