



Teesdale & Weardale Search & Mountain Rescue Team

Newsletter - New Year 2024

Welcome to the 2024 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)

Can I start by wishing all of our supporters a Happy New Year.

Callouts in 2023 were down from a very high number in 2022 of 53 to 35 this year. This lower number appears to be because we had had a particularly quiet start to the year Jan-Mar. Our average over the last few years callouts has been between 35-45. Looking at the type of calls the number of searches for missing vulnerable people on behalf of the Police is down this year while the number of 'ambulance assist', e.g. injured mountain bikers in Hamsterley Forest, is up. On 2 occasions this year we had to call on helicopter assistance, both at Cauldron Snout, once utilising the Great North Air ambulance and the other occasion HM Coastguard helicopter from Prestwick.

After 8 years as Team Leader and 7 years as Deputy Team Leader before that I have decided to stand down as Team Leader and Treasurer at our AGM in November. I will be remaining in the Team as a Hill Team member and be available to help the Team in any way I can.

2024 will be a busy year and the support of Associate Team members is really appreciated.

In memory of Ian Findlay MBE

Alan Best - (Past Team Leader, Vice President)

Team members who were fortunate to know Ian Findlay during his long commitment to the Team had a huge respect for him and for his considerable contribution to the work and development of the 'Fell Rescue' over decades. His influence upon us was marked and profound.





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When I drive up the Dale, as I still frequently do, to walk in all seasons, or to cross country ski when, more rarely now, snow cover allows, Ian is so often vividly remembered. For Lesley and me he will always be closely associated with a place; it might be a location for a rendezvous, a search control, a training exercise, a radio relay, a bivvy site, a rescue, the finding of a casualty, the recovery of a crag fast ewe or dog. All of these at different times of the year, times of day or night, and through the spectrum of weathers, often the most severe, that the Dale and High Pennines can throw at us.

As we journey up Dale passing these places, we often recall Ian. On Holwick Scar the crag fast sheep, his numerous rescues from Low Force and High Force Waterfalls, up the Tees the river safety training near Widdybank, further on recovery of the many folk stuck or injured at Cauldron Snout, the searches for lost and frightened walkers higher up Maize Beck, on to Greg's Hut and Cross Fell. On Mickle Fell, Ian leading the way with 'grass types navigation' (his speciality), in thick mist to Silverband by following different bands of vegetation, cross country skiing near the weather station, taking a stretcher over the ice pack on Cow Green that had built up where the Tees runs into the reservoir. More isolated places beyond Meldon. There were the nights 'bivvying' high on the Pennines. In Ian's case, a bivvy meant him walking around the group in his wellies to keep warm, the rest of us in our 4 season sleeping bags cocooned in our survival bags. All these places associated with Ian's years in the team.

These are just a few of the events from a long journey over time and place from which we mould our memories. Ian always tackled these challenges with such a calm demeanour, with a deep strength, physically and of character, always thinking of others in his group, putting their interests at the heart of his decision making.

Ian joined the group that made up the 'Fell Rescue' five years after its formation meeting at the High Force Hotel. This followed the tragedy above Birkdale Farm when a young man lost his life in March 1968 crossing Maize Beck and a friend perished overnight in torrential rain and strong winds. In Ian's first decade the team mainly responded to the recovery of casualties on the fells with occasional searches for overdue walkers and school groups.

Ian lived at Hunt Hall opposite the Langdon Beck Youth Hostel and so was usually closest at hand for incidents at High Force. In 1986 a father and son fell into the river above the falls with the father ending up on the ledge next to the torrent. Ian waded across the swollen river at the overflow to abseil down to the man and was then helped by visitors to get the man off the ledge. All the way escorting the man to his family the father asked if his son was alright. Tragically the son didn't survive. Ian was awarded the bronze medal by the Order of St John for his actions that day, this added to his MBE awarded for his ecological and conservation work.

As Warden of the Nature Reserve Ian kept meticulous records of the Upper Dale's flora and of its weather. Ian took daily manual readings from the weather station at Cow Green – whatever the weather. This would lead him to learn to cross country ski and on many a winters day his tracks could be followed over Widdybank Fell. Yes, we did truly ski across Cow Green on ice covered with snow at the North West end, what faith and trust I had in that man. The only time I remember his judgement letting him down was when I got a phone call around 8 pm one late January evening from his wife Ruth. Following several days of heavy snowfall Ian had left at first light that morning to fulfil an ambition to ski to the summit of Cross Fell but had not returned. We were preparing to set off to try to get to Garrigill with a small group when another call from Ruth reported him home after a successful cross country adventure but a long hazardous return journey over Yad Moss.

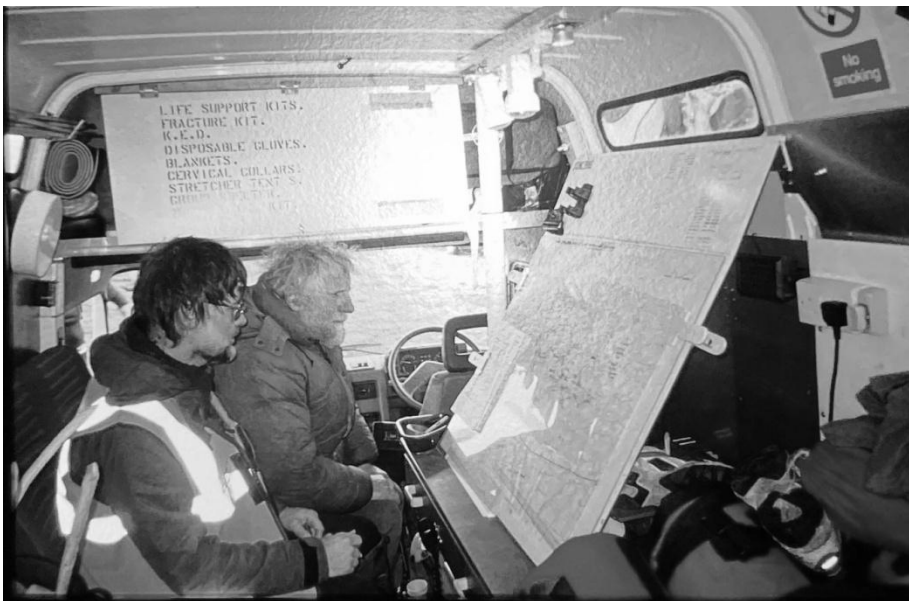
Ian was a group leader for many years. I worked alongside him for days in Kielder Forest following the Lockerbie Air Disaster. He always remembered the time, a few days into the search, when we entered a clearing from either end to find clothing and personal effects with a one piece baby grow hanging from a tree and an open children's story book nearby. Ian was a father of three and grandfather to five, was



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Father Christmas at Middleton's Christmas Fair and helped organise the annual visit of children from Chernobyl after the nuclear disaster. He was particularly affected by what we found that day. Children came first. Lesley was at the cinema in Darlington with her daughter watching the Harry Potter film, her pager went off as did another one at the same time from two rows behind, and there was Ian with grandchildren, they both agreed the priority was that the children should see the end of the film before responding to the callout!

In the late 1980s and early 1990s the team fully grasped and were actively engaged in the fast developing ideas surrounding search. The need for an early call from the police; interviewing friends and relatives of missing people; involved with lost person behaviour being made relevant to the UK by Ged Feeney and others; the effectiveness of small group searching with purposeful wandering rather than the long line of searchers often just watching their next footstep controlled with whistles and CB radios; the need for sectoring and control of boundaries and better communications. Ian was actively involved in all these changes becoming Training Officer.



He also had a never ending drive for a team members' fitness, to be able to be at their best during a long search. In this regard Ian used his link with Deerbolt PE staff as a Prison Visitor to arrange weekly fitness training sessions in their gym. Those who took part still carry the bruising scars of the handball touch rugby type game he invented that ended the sessions with Ian launching many of us into orbit. He was a powerfully built man.

Ian's strengths influenced so many who joined the team. He helped to give confidence to so many to be effective in search and rescue. As he said himself when he retired from the team "The spirit and banter is what I will miss the most". I treasure the conversations, humour, his spirit and the many memories of place and comradeship.

From **David Bartles-Smith** - (past Team Leader, Vice President)

Call sign Teesdale 2 was a legend. Long hard hill exercises were always all the more fun with Ian around. His 'can do' attitude, stamina and extraordinary knowledge of our Pennine landscape left me in no doubt that time spent with Ian would always be treasured. Commentary on the flora, fauna, stories of endeavour and sometimes heroics left many of us in awe and I will always have great memories of our debriefs amidst steaming soup, wet gear and a huge smile in Ian's face, no matter how challenging the day had been.



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Ian loved a hard day on the hill and brought to the Team huge experience, people insight and judgement that would help shape and mould many a mountain rescuer. I recall one long night on Mickel Fell during a search when Ian tramped around all night in his wellies. Wet, cold but hard as nails. Attitude. Maybe not my choice of footwear but with Ian, you always knew you were in good company. They say when the **** hits the fan you know who you want around you. Ian brought so much to the Team off the hill too. Calmness, reason, opinion, and commitment drove the Team forward on many fronts, and enabled so much of the progress made in recent decades. As Team leader it was often Ian that I would turn to. My trusted informal mentor, good friend, and mountain goat.

Ian Findlay MBE
24th November 1935 - 19th March 2023
TWSMRT (Hill Team) 1973 - 2005; (Vice President) 2005 - 2023

Team Callouts (September – December 2023)

Date	Callout number	Description
09.00 06/12/2023	43	Team searched farm land near Willington
09.00 03/12/2023	42	The Canoe Team again searched the section of river from above Willington down to Durham in response to the missing male from Willington. A large and assorted range of clothes were recovered from the river and passed on to the police for future checks. The river levels were much lower than on previous searches which allowed access to areas that were previously inaccessible however the conditions were very cold with heavy snow on the banks and occasional river ice.
12.45 02/12/2023	41	Team called by NEAS to a female walker with a broken ankle. Team stood down after reaching the reported location before discovering the wrong location had been passed to the team. The lady was then rescued by Penrith who were better placed to access the true location of the casualty.
17.00 01/12/2023	40	Team called to assist Fire, Police and Ambulance service with the evacuation of a female found near Tudhoe.



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12.00 23/11/2023	39	Team called by Ambulance service to assist with the extraction of a patient who had slipped and sustained a lower leg injury near Tunstall Reservoir. 8 team member responded and carried the casualty, via a vacuum mattress, the short (but very muddy) distance to the waiting ambulance.
08.30 18/11/2023	38	The Canoe Team again searched for the young man missing from Willington. Three members of the Team's canoe group with a Team driver supporting on land searched the River Wear from Sunnybrow to Durham City, a distance of over 20kms. River levels had been up and back down again but were lower than those seen on the previous search allowing for more coverage of some areas of the river. Despite 7 hours on the water nothing was found.
14.55 18/11/2023	37	Whilst on the way back from a callout our Control Vehicle driver came across a single vehicle road traffic collision. He informed Durham Police and provided medical care to the occupants of the car. A busy day with three incidents before the team deploy on their annual night exercise this evening.
13.15 18/11/2023	36	The team were called by North East Ambulance Service to assist a lady who had suffered a back injury whilst out for a walk in the woods near Esh Winning. We located the casualty and evacuated her to a nearby NEAS ambulance. Medical care was provided by NEAS.
09.00 04/11/2023	35	Day 2 of our search for the young man missing from Willington. Four members of the Team's canoe group with two more supporting on land searched the River Wear from Sunnybrow to Durham City, a distance of over 20kms. River levels had dropped significantly from the preceding day allowing for more favourable conditions but despite 7 hours on the water nothing was found.
09.00 03/11/2023	34	Team called to assist in the ongoing search for a missing male. 12 Team members and 1 Team dog searched rough ground in the area the missing male was known to visit. Nothing found.
02.00 28/10/2023	33	Team called by police in the small hours of the morning to search for a missing vulnerable male who's vehicle had been found near a woodland on the outskirts of Wheatley Hill. The team were stood down while in the planning phase when the missing male was found by the police in the woodland.
16.47 22/10/2023	32	Late this afternoon the team were called by Durham Constabulary to assist in the search for two females near Tunstall Reservoir, who had taken a wrong turn and become disoriented. We are pleased to say that the two ladies were located safe and well by one of the local game keepers as the team and Search Dog Tam from Mountain Rescue Search Dogs England were deploying. The ladies were very grateful to all who attended, in this instance and they did exactly the right thing and called 999. The temperature at this time of year can be deceptive and as we were all standing down the temperature had dropped to 2°C and was falling. Had they not called for assistance the outcome could have been very different. A great outcome for all, and thanks to our colleagues at Crook Police for their support, with officers and a police drone in attendance.
11.44 24/09/2023	31	Team was called out to a lady who had slipped down an embankment on Cockfield Fell and injured her shoulder. Access was extremely difficult, down steep slippery slopes, covered in gorse. Thanks to 2 members of the public who assisted us with the help of a machete. The last 20m required us to walk through the river to get to the injured female, beneath a very steep slope. The lady was assessed by paramedics who we had led to the incident site. After being given pain relief we were able to assist the lady across the river and walk her to a nearby farm to a NEAS ambulance.
23.55 17/09/2023	30	Requested by police for advice to support finding a lost male in the Ferryhill area. Support given but Team not physically deployed.
12.16 10/09/2023	29	The team was called out today to a lady who was suffering a heat related issue in a remote area of moorland north of Smiddy Shaw Reservoir nr Waskerely. 9 team members attended, and we were able to walk the lady back to the dam with our assistance.



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16.30 06/09/2023	28	Team called to assist a woman who had fallen mid way down Cauldron Snout waterfall path. The Team packaged the lady and coordinated a winch rescue by the Coastguard Helicopter who evacuated the lady to James Cook hospital.
16.00 03/09/2023	27	Team called to a teenager who'd fallen off his mountain bike while riding in Hamsterley Forest. Team packaged the casualty and transported them to the NEAS ambulance.
19.25 02/09/2023	26	The team were asked by Durham Constabulary to help search for an elderly missing person in the Wolsingham area. As the first of the team member arrived on scene, the police informed TWSMRT that the person had been found. The team were stood down.



High Force - casualty to awaiting ambulance



Directing helicopter to casualty site at Cauldron Snout

Planning an exercise

Chris Roberts (Support Lead)

Training is vital for the Team to operate effectively. A great deal of planning is necessary to ensure that all members of the team are callout ready. Team exercises form an important part of that training, and the night exercise is one of the highlights in the team's training calendar because, as it says on the tin, it is run at night during the hours of darkness.

Together with another team member I undertook the planning of last November's night exercise.

We knew the date, but then had to consider the location and the narrative. The more realistic an exercise the more the team members are engaged.

I live in Cotherstone, I know the surrounding area well, and have a few contacts that I could enlist to help. We agreed that Cotherstone High Moor would be a suitable location for the exercise. More specifically, for those that know it, we chose an area of around 10 square kilometers between Goldsborough and Shacklesborough.



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Looking across 'out of bounds' to Shacklesborough



Looking back to Goldsborough

Typically a night exercise starts at nightfall, around 18:00, and lasts between 5 and 6 hours. The exercise scenario needs to keep as many members of the team as possible engaged for the whole of this period and in this case, we also wanted the dogs to play their part.

A scenario was created that would evolve during the exercise keeping the responses as dynamic as possible.

The story was this:

A local couple had decided to walk out to a high spot, Shacklesborough, on Cotherstone Moor, in darkness, with the intention of seeing the Northern Lights (does happen this time of year in good conditions). Their friend, and local game keeper, has agreed to run from his house, across the moors to meet up with them.

In the scenario one of the couple takes a fall and severely injures her leg. This will be 'reported' on a 999 call at 18:00, which will be relayed to the Team (by me). From this point the incident is now running 'live'. During the rescue it will be revealed that a third person, the game keeper, should have arrived. Information from the casualties, and another informant, give details of his last known location and his possible route. It is now known that there is another casualty out on the moor. It will be for the Search Managers to quickly devise a search strategy.



Location of second casualty site

From the map it was relatively easy to make plans, however firsthand knowledge is key. Over a couple of days we explored the area in detail. We considered the risks involved, the possible casualty sites, vehicle access, and the access points for casualties and rescuers. Since one of the casualties was the local gamekeeper his knowledge of the area and assistance with gaining access to the moor was invaluable.



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From our reconnaissance we were able to produce a map of the search area, and importantly the out of bounds (high risk) areas, and the potential risks, which would be given to the search managers on the night.

Before the night of the exercise there were a few more jobs to do. There are a number of properties surrounding the search area; a quick visit to each just to explain what was being planned. This proved to be very useful as a few useful future contacts were made. The very kind residents from Clove Lodge offered the use of their barn for shelter and the provision of hot drinks - this proved very useful and much appreciated for the 23:30 debrief.

The exercise casualties needed briefing, and a little convincing that it would be fun.

The exercise plan was then submitted to the Team Leader for his final approval.

The exercise was to be run as a live incident. Having said that, the start time, and rendezvous (RV) was circulated in advance. The Search Managers were also given an advance 'heads up' about the first phase to allow some planning time.

At 17:00 on the day of the exercise I met up at the RV with the casualties and they were given their final briefings about their injuries and stories. It was confirmed that they had the correct clothing and equipment, and a means to communicate. Typically, what had hoped to be clear and cloudless night turned out to be wet, windy, and cold.



The couple were driven along the shooting track and then walked to their spot on the side of Shacklesborough.

By now team members were arriving at the RV and the control vehicle was in place. I gave the Search Manager his briefing and the exercise was underway.

It was now time to drive the next casualty to his drop off point. Luckily his knowledge of the moor meant that he was able to confidently walk into his incident site - an old shepherd's hut. His exercise injury was to his knee, making him immobile.

With all of the casualties dropped off my involvement was coming to an end. I called in at the control vehicle to make sure that all of the information regarding the gamekeeper had been received and gave a couple of additional pieces that would be useful.



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By around 20:30 the first two casualties had been located, treated, and returned to the RV where they were debriefed by the Search Manager. I thanked them and they went on their way home. For the rest of the exercise I listened in to communications, and phoned my casualty to make sure he was ok.



By around 23:30 the final casualty had also been found, treated, and returned to the road head. The whole team held a briefing in the barn and that was the end of the exercise.

The exercise was, based on the debrief, successful. Very pleasing that all of the planning had been well worth it. Many thanks to the three volunteer casualties, who all reported that they found the whole experience very interesting and worthwhile - there were a couple of comments about the horrible weather. Thanks to the landowner for allowing access, and thanks again to Clove Lodge for providing shelter and hot drinks for the debrief.



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Joining the Committee as IT and Radio lead

Mark Sauer (IT and Radio Lead)

Did you know we have 7 radio repeaters around the region, all interconnected, to help provide radio coverage in our hot spot areas? All of which are used to help team members, and our incident control, stay in communication during call-outs in some of the remotest places in our area? Not only that, did you know every Hill Team member, and all vehicles, has a radio set, which all needs to be maintained and kept up to date with the latest software updates?

Not only does this provide safety and direct communications in places where there is sometimes no mobile phone coverage, it also lets Incident Control track team members and vehicles via GPS on our mapping software. Creating, maintaining, and supporting this network is a team effort, on top of everything else we support and do to keep the team operational.

So how does that all fit in with the title of this article?

Attending callouts is the visible part of what we do as a Team. It's the part that the public sees, and it's the reason why we exist as a Team providing that service 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. What the public doesn't see though is the behind the scenes work that is required to run the Team and the governance that is put in place to ensure the team is run as effectively as possible.

This is where the committee comes in; divided into around 18 sub-area from Team Leader to deputy leads, to area leads of which I am now part.

During our November 2023 Team committee meeting, I put myself forward as the committee Radio and IT lead. All committee and lead roles need to be elected, and I was elected for the role of Radio and IT, though I must admit I was the only name put forward, so I had no competition!

My new role within the team has now extended beyond being a Hill Team member, but now includes having to understand how this all fits together and what that means. Part of a sub-group beavering away behind the scenes ensuring the team keeps running.

Roles, as with our hill team, support team, area leads and committee, all held by volunteers, enabling the service to be provided that the public sees.

Team member news

At the Team AGM in November 2023 the Team Leader, Steve Owers, congratulated the following on their milestone service achievements. There will be a formal presentation of the certificates later this year to coincide with the presentation of Coronation Medals when we receive them.

30-year service: Paul FELL

25-year service: Adam HEARN and Rich WARNE

20-year service: Pete BELL and Russ WARNE

10-year service: Damian BUBB, Eric GILHOOLEY and Helen JAMES



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New Full Team Members

The Team would like to congratulate 6 new hill team members that passed their final assessment day. Having already spent 12 months training with the team the final assessment day required trainees to show: competent/safe use of team equipment, radios & communications, basic casualty care, team procedures and a night time navigation assessment. Congratulations and well done.



Fundraising

Sarah Hall (Fundraising Officer)

Towards the end of last year we had 6 supporters who completed the Great North Run to raise money for the team. Well done to everyone who participated! We have also secured 6 places for this years' Great North Run; 3 places which are still available. If you, or anyone you know, would like to run the Great North Run and raise money for the team, please let me know.

There will also be further street collections taking place this year (dates to be confirmed), Barnard Castle will take place in May, followed by Darlington in September and Durham City which will take place in December.





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If anyone is keen to fundraise for the team or attend any of the street collections please get in touch with me, sarah.hall@twsmrt.org.uk.

Deputy Team Leader, John Little and his family are opening their garden once again for the National Garden Scheme (NGS) along with three other gardens in the hamlet of Old Quarrington. Like the last three years, proceeds from Tea and Cake sales will be going to TWSMRT. John said, "In previous years we have welcomed around 300 guests and raised £2000 for the NGS and over £1000 for the Team, but we do need support to provide the 30 odd homemade cakes required to make the event a success". The gates are open between 11:00 and 16:00 on Sunday the 23rd of June and we'd also welcome anyone willing to help with entries, parking, manning the tea stall or even washing up.



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and Mountain Rescue Team**

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