



Teesdale & Weardale Search & Mountain Rescue Team

Newsletter

January 2025





Teesdale & Weardale Search & Mountain Rescue Team

Team Leader's message

John Little (Team Leader)

This is my first newsletter as Team Leader and it's only right that I start by paying tribute to the work Steve put into the role over the last 8 years and 7 years as Deputy Team Leader before that. Steve worked incredibly hard throughout that period, a period where the Team purchased numerous new vehicles, moved from one old base to two new ones, recruited and trained dozens of new Team members and documented many aspects of Team business. Andy Neill has also stood down as secretary after 15 years of hard work behind the scenes.

With the need to cover the vast amount of work Steve had been doing, the Team has started work on restructuring the leadership. We now have four Deputy Team Leaders which have responsibility for specific areas of team business: hill operations (Paul Fell), technical operations (Rich Warne), resources (Mike Needham) and support (Jane Ascroft). By splitting the workload along these practical lines we should have clearer areas of responsibility (and less general areas falling to the team leader). The leadership team has also started work on formally updating the Team structure. The first part of this is migrating the team to a CIO structure which will protect the Team's current and future trustees.

2024 was a busy year for the team characterised by a number of periods of intense activity followed by periods of inactivity. Towards the end of the year the team were involved in two river searches both of which unfortunately concluded with the finding of bodies. Team members with over 5 years volunteering service were also presented with their coronation medals by the Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Durham at our Team and Medals night, where we also formally paid tribute to Marc Tomlinson.

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Looking forward to 2025, 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 2024. Without this support we would not be able to provide the service we do.



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End of an Era – A new Team Leader

Jane Ascroft with contributions from Andy Neill

On 8th November 2024, at our 18th AGM, Steve Owers stood down as our Team Leader after 8 years at the helm. He is replaced by John Little to whom we wish the very best of luck. This article looks back at some of Steve's achievements during his time as Team Leader.

Steve took on the role as Team Leader in November 2016. His 7 years as Deputy Team Leader, working under and learning from 3 former Team Leaders, stood him in good stead for the post, as did his 36 year career as firefighter and fire officer.

No doubt one of his greatest achievements as Team Leader was to see us through the Covid years. Two lockdowns, restrictions on how we attended callouts, restrictions on how we trained and the need to ensure Team members had adequate PPE was a huge challenge for the Team, especially in the early days when reliable information was non-existent. Steve led us through these challenges, always caring about the welfare of Team members and ensured we came out the other side in a strong position.

Another great achievement, working alongside Andy Neill, was to secure a 50 year lease on two new bases, one at Sniperley near Durham and the other in Barnard Castle, from Durham & Darlington Fire & Rescue. The Fire Service have been and continue to be very supportive of the Team.

He has also overseen a transformation of the Team's approach to risk management, including the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and training necessary to mitigate risk to team members and increase the safety of the public.

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Steve at Greg's Hut, September 2024



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When the role of Treasurer became vacant 7 years ago Steve also took that on and performed it to an extremely high level considering his non-financial background, no doubt due to his willingness to learn, his tenacity and his vision of what he wanted to achieve.

Other projects instigated by Steve include the purchase of the stretcher wheel, the introduction of minimum training requirements, our response to Storm Arwen, emergency plans for High Force & Swinhope Ski Area and others too numerous to mention.

He led from the front. His attendance at training sessions, callouts and fundraising events is unparalleled. If it was possible for him to be there, he was inevitably there, no matter what time of day or night.

When I first met Steve I compared him to a stick of Blackpool rock – if you cut him in half it would say “Mountain Rescue” all the way through him. He is a committed, professional and hard working individual who cares about people and wants to help. He is without doubt a strong character, not afraid to disagree with people or tell us Team members when we’d done something wrong, but he was also quick to praise when we’d done well. Always encouraging and supportive, he was (and still is) an excellent trainer and mentor, keen to pass his knowledge and ways of working onto anyone willing to learn.

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He has left a legacy of an organisation that is secure in its funding, functions in a professional manner, and works in a much more efficient, effective and safer way. His leadership will be sorely missed, but we’re pleased he is staying on as hill team member, search manager and duty controller.

Thank you, Steve, for your time as Team Leader and we look forward to working with and supporting John as he takes the Team into the future.



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November Night Exercise

Ben Blackett Ord

As usual November heralded the team's annual night exercise. This year it was held slightly out of area on the Helbeck Estate just over the county boundary into Cumbria.

The team were called to look for a missing gamekeeper (Bennet) and assembled at 6pm just off the B6276 as darkness fell and the temperature dropped. Under Mark Sauer's direction two search teams and a dog team were tasked with searching about 2sq kms around the ruined farm at Tarn House, where Bennet had been known to go foxing. Dog Blythe did his stuff and managed to locate Bennet reasonably quickly but an unsafe building, a nasty headwound, a casualty coming in and out of consciousness and a firearm provided a challenging set of circumstances. With Paul Fell and Helen James first at the incident site the primary survey was completed efficiently, first aid administered and the casualty stabilised.



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After a challenging walk in, including negotiating a number of fences, the support team arrived with a stretcher and the necessary extraction kit. Russ Warne immediately took control of the firearm, made it safe and kept it in his possession during the extraction. All was proceeding according to plan until the casualty regained consciousness and started asking about the whereabouts of his companion, Hebe. Who was Hebe? No-one told us about a second casualty....She had apparently gone to get help some hours earlier.

Back to square one....another search and in due course another casualty found, in a building this time, suffering from asphyxia from a gas stove...unconscious. Luckily the building was a near a track and a vehicle extraction was possible.



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Meanwhile Bennet was extracted by stretcher, all sixteen stone of him, the fences were avoided this time but one or two fast flowing becks produced some wet feet. Back at the RV both casualties made a miraculous recovery and went on their merry way.

Overall the exercise was a great success. The firearm was a new challenge and a second casualty coming to light halfway through was a reminder to the team to be prepared for the unexpected.

Following the debrief most of the team went home but half a dozen of us decided to stay out and we retired to a barn on the estate where Jamie Siddle's homemade wine fortified us before a night under the stars.....





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TWSMRT Call-outs from Inception to Completion

Pete Bell (Search lead)

The team interacts with Durham Police, County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service (CDDFRS) and North East Ambulance Service (NEAS) to assist them where our expertise can help, but how does this happen?

Here is a simplified view of the callout process for a missing person.

Durham Police and CDDFRS call our duty control number and speak to our Duty Controller (DC), requesting our assistance. The DC opens an incident log and consults with the Team search managers (SM), who will determine if the team will be called out.

To instigate a team callout, the DC sends a callout to team members through an application in the incident log. This callout information will include a brief description of the incident, including the person involved, the Incident/Search Manager and the meeting place (RV) for the incident.

At the RV, the search manager(s) based in our Control vehicle will designate areas to search, this will be based on information received from the Police and referencing missing person behaviour databases as appropriate. The Incident/Search Manager works closely with the Police Search Advisor (PoISA) for continuity and search progression.

If it is a CDDFRS water incident the Search/Incident Manager will liaise with the appropriate Fire Officer and develop a bankside search plan.

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Our search dogs and handlers will be assigned to their search areas in advance of deployment of ground search team members.

Team members are split into small groups of up to six team members with a group leader nominated within the group. The group leader is the search /incident manager's 'eyes on the ground' and liaises with Control. The Incident/search manager will brief the group leaders with their search areas, how they want the areas searched, relevant details of the missing person and potential search hazards. The group leaders will brief their search groups and commence their searching.

Once all the areas have been searched, we will have a positive or negative result in finding the missing person. If it is positive we will hand the missing person over to the Police as they have responsibility for missing persons. If it is negative and new information has been received, then the search manager will designate new search areas and the process continues. If there has been no new information received the Team will stand down after discussion with the PoISA.



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Fundraising Update

Sarah Hall (Fundraising Lead)

Since the last newsletter, all of the 5 runners completed the Great North Run to raise money for the team. The conditions were awful (which I can say first hand, given I also ran it!) Everyone did extremely well and raised a lot of money for the team. I have secured 8 places for the Great North Run this year and all of the places have already been taken, which is great news.

We also held a street collection in December in Durham City, from which a good amount of money was raised considering the conditions. It was the same weekend that Storm Darragh hit us! Thank you to all of you who stood in the street and collected in such awful conditions.

We will also hold our usual street collections in Barnard Castle, Darlington and Durham. The dates for this year are as follows:-

Barnard Castle – Saturday 31st May 2025

Darlington – Saturday 20th September 2025

Durham – Saturday 6th December 2025

If anyone is able to attend any of the street collections, please let me know.

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Other Team News

Over the weekend of 27/28 July 2024 TWSMRT assisted Swaledale MRT to provide medical cover at the ArdRock mountain bike event in Swaledale.

On Saturday 8th September we attended the re-opening of Greggs Hut on Cross Fell.

On 10th November we attended the Remembrance Service in Barnard Castle.

Congratulations to the following Team Members who passed their Remote Rescue Medical Technician exam (previously known as Casualty Care exam) in December: Nick Selmes, Martin Peat, Brad Hemmings, Hamish Carrick and Sarah Broadbent.



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Some photos from a very wet October exercise.....!





Teesdale & Weardale Search & Mountain Rescue Team

Team Callouts (July – December 2024)

Date	Callout number	Description
08.00 10/12/2024	42	The Team's Canoe section were deployed to search the river Tees as part of the continued search for the missing female from Darlington. Three paddlers supported by a Team driver searched from Low Coniscliffe, past Broken Scar and Blackton Bridge before finding a body in the vicinity of Stapleton. The Team assisted with both securing the scene and later, evacuating the body.
19.30 09/12/2024	41	The Team were called by the police to complete a dog search of the land around the river Tees at Broken Scar in Darlington in the search for the missing female. Two dogs with handlers and navigators deployed in the evening and searched for about 3 hours. Nothing found.
16.34 02/12/2024	40	Team called by the police to search for a missing female in the Eggleston area. The team were stood down 4 minutes later when the missing female was found by the police helicopter.
14.39 02/12/2024	39	Team called by NEAS to assist with a patient in Flatts Wood in Barnard Castle. The patient was evacuated to the NEAS ambulance.
16.37 17/11/2024	38	Team called by Durham police to locate and rescue a male walker benighted on Cronkley Fell. 16 team members and 2 team search dogs responded to the incident and the missing male and his pet dog was located safe and well but rather cold up on Cronkley Fell. After checking the male over he was walked off the fell and taken back to his vehicle.
09.00 15/11/2024	37	The team and a search dog worked alongside the police to search Shincliffe Wood as part of the continuing effort to locate Paul. Whilst the search was underway a body was found in the river by a police search dog.
14.00 13/11/2024	36	As part of the continuing search for a missing male, the canoe team searched the River Wear from Sunderland Bridge down to Durham while a team dog focused on the section of river around Shincliffe. Nothing was found and the search stood down as darkness fell.
12.00 12/11/2024	35	Team called by the police to assist with the search for a vulnerable male in his 50s. A dozen Team members searched Croxdale Beck Woods and surrounding areas. The search stood down as darkness fell.
15.16 08/11/2024	34	TWSMRT were called out as part of a multi agency response to an incident in Castle Eden Dene in Peterlee. The injured male had had a significant fall and required extraction through very steep and wooded terrain. The team used their expertise in stretcher carry outs to extract and carry out the casualty alongside the fire service to the roadside to the awaiting ambulance.
17.48 07/11/2024	33	The team were asked to help North Of Tyne MRT and Northumberland National Park MRT. They had been called to assist NEAS with an injured horse rider on the edge of our area, near Rowlands Gill. The casualty was transported via stretcher to the waiting NEAS ambulance.
12.45 26/10/2024	32	The team were asked by NEAS to assist with a patient who had sustained a suspected broken ankle at Gibsons Cave, Bowlees. The patient was treated by our team and NEAS paramedics



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		and stretchered to the waiting ambulance for onward treatment at hospital.
12.15 21/09/2024	31	The team were asked to assist NEAS with a medical incident near Holwick.
20.10 11/09/2024	30	Team called by NEAS to find and evacuate a fell runner with a serious lower leg injury on a rough track between Esh Winning and Brandon. The male was located by a Team search dog with an hour of the Team being called and the casualty was then wheeled on the Team stretcher out to the NEAS ambulance.
17.49 22/08/2024	29	The team were called out this evening to a report of a lady with an ankle injury on a bridleway near White Kirkley farm Frosterley. 10 team members and 2 of our vehicles attended. The casualty was carried by stretcher to an ambulance near the farm.
12.42 18/08/2024	28	The team was called out this afternoon to assist NEAS with a walker with a possible lower leg injury in Hamsterley Forest. We coordinated an RV at The Grove with the NEAS Ambulance, ourselves and a friend of the casualty. He was able to lead us to the casualty about 15 mins walk from The Grove. The NEAS crew assessed the casualty while team members set up a rope system to lower the stretcher to the road and then carried the casualty to the waiting ambulance.
13.30 16/08/2024	27	The Team was asked to assist NEAS with a patient suffering chest pains in Hamsterley Forest. 17 team members and two team vehicles were mobilised. Thankfully the patient was well enough to walk to the waiting ambulance with the NEAS crew, so our Team were stood down as the first of our volunteers arrived at the incident.
18.08 05/08/2024	25	Team called to assist ambulance service with evacuation of female from riverside area near Cotherstone. 15 Team members responded and the patient was transported into the Team landrover and then onto the NEAS ambulance.
12.33 23/07/2024	24	Team called by the police to help search for vulnerable 32 year old male missing for about 12 hours. Five team members deployed to search a small area of woodland but were stood down when the missing male was located outside the area.
17.30 18/07/2024	23	Team continued search of Pelaw Wood for missing male covering some very steep and unstable ground, and some very over grown areas. Nothing found and search stood down to await further developments.
20.06 17/07/2024	22	NEAS Assist, whilst the Team were undertaking a Search in Pelaw Wood (see previous search) the team received an immediate call for assistance from North East Ambulance Service for a person who had an ankle injury in Weardale. The Team stood down from the Pelaw case and responded to the Weardale case. Once on scene the Team assisted the ambulance service in transporting the casualty, our thanks to the farmer for use of his transportation.
17.30 17/07/2024	21	Team called to re-search Pelaw Woods on the out outskirts of Durham City. 18 team members worked through very steep ground and thick undergrowth with the canoe team searching the river and another team working through a beck. Unfortunately the Team didn't find any sign of the missing male.
16.00 16/07/2024	20	Team called to search Pelaw Woods on the out outskirts of Durham City. Two dogs and a dozen Team members worked through very steep ground and thick undergrowth but didn't find any sign of the missing male. The Team stood down after clearing the immediate area of interest to await



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		the results of further investigations.
17.30 15/07/2024	19	Team called to Evenwood area to help search for a missing male. The team deployed 12 personnel and three search dogs in support of the search.
21.00 14/07/2024	18	On Sunday night 4 Team member attended Hamsterley Forest at the request of the Police to try and locate a family, with a young child and baby, who had used an emergency telephone in the forest to say they could not locate their car. Over a 2 hour period all the car parks and roads were checked but there was no sign of a car or a family. We believe the family located their car soon after making the 999 call but did not inform the police.



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Photos from callouts no. 32 (left) and 38 (right)



TEESDALE & WEARDALE SEARCH & MOUNTAIN RESCUE TEAM 2024



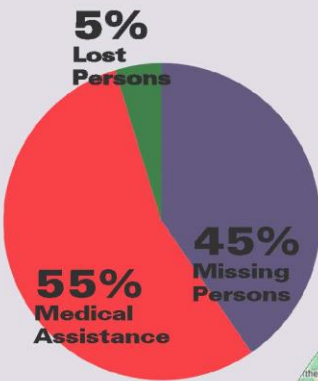
In 2024 our volunteers spent an estimated **4437** hours on:

42 
Callouts

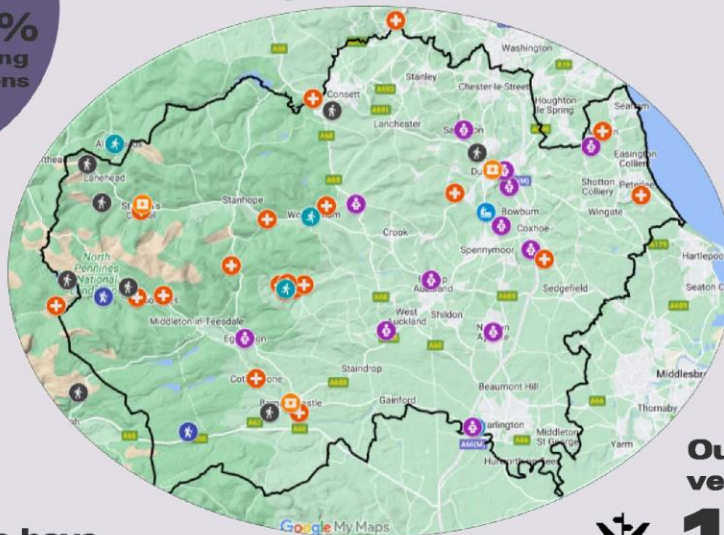
24 
Evening Training Sessions

14 
Days of Full Team Training Exercises

23 
Talks and Outreach Events



Across **1050** square miles



- Map Key**
-  Medical Assistance
 -  Missing Person
 -  Training
 -  Fundraising
 -  Event Assistance
 -  Canoe Search
 -  Benighted Walker



90% of callouts occur in the afternoon

30% between 3pm - 5pm

Team Members have **663**  combined years of service



Our Team vehicles covered **1100** miles

Our busiest month was July

Our quietest month was October



And finally, our supporters come in all shapes and sizes.....



Many thanks to our many supporters, Team members and their families, without whom there would be no Team.



Photo on front cover – Mobile 2 en route to Greg's hut, September 2024