



Swaledale Mountain Rescue Team

Mountain and Cave Rescue in Swaledale and Wensleydale

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How kemo sabe?

Indian scout Geoff learns some new tricks in North Wales.....

Ever wondered what could be done with a walking pole and two elastic bands? Well, you can create a sign-cutting stick, the simple piece of equipment employed in the 'step-by-step' method of tracking human beings.

The MRC's established course entitled 'Search Field Skills' took place over the first weekend in September 2009 at Bangor University. I shall attempt to describe some of the material covered both in the lecture room and out on the hill, however it was an incredibly intensive course and I couldn't possibly do justice to it in a short article.

Course delegates included MRT members Exmoor and Longtown and SARA. Not a large cohort, but that meant almost one-to-one tuition at times.

Each of the three days were divided into two; morning lectures from 0845 to 1230 and then travel up to the Ogwen Valley ready to start the practical exercises at 1330 until 1700. (The wind and rain in your face bit – fantastic environment!!)

The course tutors were excellent, with a vast experience and knowledge of SAR management in both this country and abroad. Here is a brief outline for each of them:

- Dr. Tony Jones – vice chairman of MR (E&W).
- Peter Howells – MRC committee member responsible for conferences & courses.
- Dr. Donald Cooper – internationally renowned academic & practitioner in SAR.
- Chris Jones – POLSA & search coordinator at the police national search centre.
- Alistair Read – Team leader of Ogwen Valley Mountain Rescue Organisation.
- Roland Leyland – Training officer for Llanberis MRT and SARDA Wales.
- John O'Shea – POLSA.

The early sessions, both taught and practical, were designed to build up the necessary skills involved in effective searching. This included the concepts of search theory: involving the determination of POA (probability of area) & POD (probability of detection). Variables such as 'sweep width', 'track line length', 'search speed', 'average maximum detection range', 'terrain type' and 'hazards' were all things to be considered.

Techniques of observation to ensure effective 'looking' included Scanning (day & night) and the use of binoculars. It is the party leader's responsibility to limit search periods to sessions of 50 minutes duration followed by 10 minutes rest. An overall time limit for a searcher of between 4 to 6 hours is advised as visual acuity and fatigue reduces thereafter.

Much was made about the analysis of terrain in the field. Firstly, the scene should be sketched in order for a strategy to be worked out to complete an effective search. This, we were told, would help in identifying important

features / plan sub-sectoring / recognise hazards and help to inform in de-brief sessions.



Typical area asked to be analysed on the course seen

After the sketching came the searching!! Items ranging from the size of a 1p coin to that of a small rucksack had been placed throughout a given area and teams were given 45 minutes to find as many as possible.



13/16 for my team – not too bad!!

One thing that was clear, they don't like line searching. Purposeful wandering yes!!

People in lines apparently spend too much time focusing on keeping level with each other (and chatting), to the detriment of 'looking'.

The 'Man tracking', I referred to earlier, we were told is a skill that can be learnt. Well if Crocodile Dundee can do it I thought I'd give it a go!! It's about getting into the mindset of the person being tracked eg. Where are they heading? How fast are they going? What are they wearing on their feet?

Team members were then challenged to record a variety of footwear prints accurately onto pre-prepared forms.



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Above the Ogwen Valley, real tracks had been laid for teams to find with 'signs' ranging from an almost complete footprint to squashed blades of grass.



Does it work I can hear you saying? Well it did for me, and I'm known for being a bit of a sceptic!! It works because it is a logical, analytical process. It can help in reducing the possible search area when considered as part of a search management plan. It is not the panacea, but it may offer an effective option when used properly.

It is currently used by the two Welsh teams mentioned above and has been successful on occasion.

The course concluded with sessions on 'Lost Person Behaviour' and 'Evidence Handling'. It was suggested that Teams should have 'evidence packs' made up ready for use, perhaps supplied by our friendly police liaison officer?

So could we see a use for tracking within SMRT? I can think of a couple of incidents in my brief time on the team when it may have helped and certainly some of the techniques employed would be of benefit to all. After all, without tracking and its associated skills, are we really doing all we can as SAR personnel or are we missing something?

Geoff G (aka Tonto – you need to be of a certain age to appreciate who he was!!)

Show Time

A little 'twist' at the end of the show.

"I like Mucker show its always nice and easy and we raise loads of money" My famous last words to my brother in the car while driving up dale to the show.

Having been to Mucker show fundraising, for the team, for the last 3 years I've always been impressed at what a lovely atmosphere there is. I think this was typified by the first person who came over to our stand had a brief chat about what a splendid job we did and rescue before my time. He the proceeded to try and force two twenty pound



A tracking exercise followed across an indoor venue under controlled conditions. This is where your sign-cutting stick comes in – predicting the stride length of the person to be found and thereby following 'step-by-step', in conjunction with other techniques, the track of said person.





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notes past the anti tamper lids on the collection tins. If only all fund raising was this easy.

The morning was the usual mix of talking to the public, selling raffle tickets for a carved barn Owl (donated by Chainsaw sculptures) and shaking tins. Then at around lunch time an elderly woman collapsed in one of the tents. We were asked to assist and team members quickly had here assessed and ready for transfer to the county ambulance. Just as she was safely inside the road ambulance the Air ambulance decided it would also drop in to see how she was. First piece of excitement for the day.



The afternoon continued to be profitable for fundraising and just as we were drawing the raffle CALLOUT. So we hurriedly pack away what we could (the tent got left where it was) and head to West Burton in Wensleydale. The Callout turned out to be fairly straight forward carry off for a member of a D of E group who had torn some ligaments.

To end the day we returned to the depot via Mucker to retrieve the tent left there. I then collapsed in front of the TV with a rather late dinner and a beer. That will teach me for describing something as quiet.

Splish-Splash-Splash

More water rescue capability for the team....no armbands required

Bank support training sounded really good fun from the emails sent out about what the day would contain. So it was with a bit of nervous excitement that I turned up to the River Tees on the last Sunday in July. There was even more excitement seeing all the brand new back team kit (come on all of us secretly get excited by shiny new toys). Soon all participating were suitably kitted up and looking like the yellow power ranger after eating too many pies.

The idea and training was to give team members the skills the might need if accidentally end up in swift water. So Rich quickly had us defensively and aggressively swimming for eddies and using ferry angles to move across the river. This was really good fun but

would imagine considerably harder in a real accidental immersion situation. There was also lots of good advice on why we shouldn't enter the water which having experienced the power of the Tees on a fairly calm day I don't think anyone needed much convincing of.

In the afternoon some river crossing methods were tried. This seemed to serve to convince most people that for anything greater than a trickle finding a bridge was the best option. The culmination of the exercise was a river bank search which is the most likely task for the team.

Overall a really useful and fun day.

Andy B

Floodex 2009

Launch of major Europe wide flood exercise

From the 22nd until 25th September 2009 a European flood resilience exercise was held in the Netherlands. The aim was to recreate the floods of 1953 that caused devastation across Holland and the East of England.

As a guest of rescue training and equipment company, AssetCo, Rich attended the UK launch at the Fire Service College near Warwick.

Crews from nine UK Fire & Rescue Services and other specialist rescue organisations including RNLI and RAF assembled at the College on Monday 21st September for a briefing, an introduction to Floodex and flood risk, together with an overview of the Fire Service College and National Resilience programmes.

It was an interesting day with plenty of opportunities to observe shiny kit and do a bit of networking with other training providers and mountain rescue colleagues.

Rich H





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Thanks

A note of appreciation received from North Yorkshire Police following a recent search for a missing person by SMRT. Revised by SMRT to remove names of individuals concerned from the original text:

"Sir,

Tonight I POLSA'd a high risk missing from home near Masham where there was serious concern for her safety. She had left the family home at around 1700 hrs. An officer led the search on the ground. I advised on the search strategy from York.

Swaledale Mountain Rescue Team was called out and responded in record time... The Swaledale team carried out their initial 'hasty' searches of the immediate area around her home address. The police resources concentrated on checking the pubs / guest houses / public roads / beauty spots etc.

She was found at 2302 hours, close to the reservoir, by the Swaledale team. Undoubtedly she would not have survived the night. The Swaledale team doctor was on hand to render the initial medical assistance and she was taken to James Cook Hospital by the RAF.

Once again without the assistance of the fell rescue team we would have been struggling to resource a night time rural search of this nature and the missing person would undoubtedly have died.

I believe Swaledale Mountain Rescue Team and the SARDA dogs that turned out tonight are deserved of a suitable letter of thanks from a senior officer."

Fishman Strikes Again

Well done to Dave R who took part in the Great North Swim across (one corner!) of Windermere on Saturday 12th September raising funds for the team in the process.



Underground

Crackpot Exercise 29th June 2009





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Recent Incidents

SMRT is having another busy year.

(20) 03/10/2009, 1710hrs: Team called to recover an injured person from the fell near to Keld. Casualty evacuated by air ambulance and the team stood down on route.

(19) 15/09/2009, 1520hrs: Team requested to assist Yorkshire Ambulance Service with the rescue of an 84 year old male who had fallen down crags at Mill Gill, Askrigg and come to rest at the base of a tree above a vertical drop. Air Ambulance used to transport equipment and manpower to the scene. Technical rope rescue was used to extract the casualty from the gill before being evacuated by Air Ambulance. Assisted by North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service. [Northern Echo](#) or [Northern Echo](#)

(D vii) 09/09/2009, 2305hrs: Team search dog and handler called to assist [Calder Valley SRT](#) in the search for a missing and highly vulnerable 13 year old female in the Shelf area between Bradford and Halifax. Stood-down when person was located.

06/09/2009 Underground rescue leader called to provide assistance to [Teesdale & Weardale S&MRT](#) in rescue of a dog trapped down a shaft on Mickle Fell.

(D vi) 02/09/2009, 1115hrs: Search dog unit called to assist Cleveland SRT with the search for a vulnerable male in the Eston area. Person located safe and well by Cleveland search group shortly after handler arrived on scene.

(18) 02/09/2009, 1620hrs: Team called to Pen Hill, Wensleydale to recover a member of a DofE expedition group suffering from a lower leg injury. The well prepared group called for assistance when it became impossible to make any further progress. Young male was stretchered approximately 2km down from summit to awaiting team vehicle and eventually to the valley.

02/09/2009 Team members provided medical assistance to an elderly lady whilst attending Muker Show. The patient was handed over to the ambulance service on their arrival.

24/08/2009 0615 hrs: Standby to assist [Teesdale & Weardale Search and Mountain Rescue Team](#) with search for missing person in the Chester le Street area. The person was located before the team were mobilised.

(17) 21/08/2009, 1205hrs: Team along with its search dog unit called to assist North Yorkshire Police with the search for a 69 year old female reported missing from home in the Ripon area. Extensive searches carried out to the east of Ripon including the use of a canoe to search the River Ure. Nothing found and search stood-down at 2015hrs. [Northern Echo article](#). *Postscript: Missing person returned home safe and well 24 hours after search initiated.*



(16) 07/08/2009, 2015hrs: The team along with two SARDA dogs and handlers were called to an area near Masham to assist North Yorkshire Police in the search for a person reported missing from home. After initial searches of the immediate area, the search area was extended, and the missing person was located by team members shortly after. The casualty was packaged and transferred to hospital via helicopter.

(15) 19/07/2009, 2015hrs: Team were called to Gunnerside Gill to assist a 21 year old male with knee injury. After locating the casualty, he was carried off by stretcher to a team vehicle and transported to Gunnerside for hand over to the ambulance service.

(14) 13/07/2009, 2125hrs: Team with two search dog units were called to an area near Leighton Reservoir, Masham to assist North Yorkshire Police in the search for a person reported missing from home. Additional support was provided by RAF Sea King and local gamekeepers. The missing person was located in a nearby town by the Police as team members were being briefed.

(13) 27/06/2009, 1735hrs: Team along with three search dog units called to the Tan Hill area to search for a family (2 adults and 2 young children) who had become disorientated in hill fog during a short walk. Shortly after the team arrived on scene the family were located safe and well by a police officer.

(12) 26/06/2009, 1636hrs: Team called to assist female dog walker who had become stuck approximately 40m down a very steep and slippery slope at Hackfall Wood, nr Masham after attempting to self rescue her old dog. The immobile dog was carried up the very steep slope by the team dog handler (who really earned his Pedigree Chum this afternoon!); the uninjured owner was then assisted, with the help of a team member and rope, back to the safety of the path.

(11) 13/06/2009 The team provided assistance to a number of competitors of the annual Swaledale Marathon with minor injuries and the effects of day.

(10) 07/06/2009 Assistance provided to two competitors of the Mintex Motorcycle Trial. One with minor injuries; second with lower arm injury.



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Historical Statistics

It's interesting to note the significant increase in callouts received by the team last year.

Swaledale MRT Incident Statistics

