



## TEESDALE AND WEARDALE SEARCH AND MOUNTAIN RESCUE TEAM

### NEWSLETTER – JANUARY 2016



Search for:  
**Teesdale and Weardale Search and Mountain Rescue Team**

The Team would like to say a huge thank you to the Co-op Garage in Barnard Castle for their generous donation of £400 to the Team.

A donation of £500 was received on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2015 from our friends at Weardale Sportive. These funds will contribute to our medical costs.

#### **Christmas Callouts**

For families taking flight from the floods it has been a difficult Christmas. Overnight on Boxing Day the Rivers Ouse and Foss burst their banks, the flood barriers failed and the streets of York became part of the river system. Contaminated water, full of hazards, flooded homes and cut off several communities.

The response from Mountain Rescue teams across the country has been remarkable. Literally hundreds of people - 17 teams drove to York - each providing around 10 personnel over 2 days - to rescue people from their flooded homes.

The flooding followed on from a snowstorm that led to TWSMRT being called on to support the North East Ambulance Service to provide a 'blue lights' 4x4 service to casualties in inaccessible areas. The Team attended over 16 incidents.

We were also called out on 27 December to support the Northumberland search for a missing grandmother and as I write the team is again on standby for flood events in Cumbria.

Team members have given up precious family time and missed out on festivities to help others. It's not always easy persuading your children that 'mummy' or 'daddy' needs to go to 'work' on a holiday - or to ask partners or family members to step in with the childcare and to miss or re-arrange family gatherings. We owe a huge thank you to our partners, children, friends and extended families for enabling us to do what we do.

My children said: "It's a good thing to go and help other people who need it more". They're just a little bit proud of mummy - and that makes me feel very humble.

ANNE ALLEN



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### 2015 Night Exercise.

This 2015 night exercise took place on the Saturday and Sunday of 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> November. Possibly the most eagerly anticipated training event of the year, it gives team members the opportunity to practice their skills at night in often challenging conditions. A scenario was planned with team members being informed of the start time and location: '4pm at Cow Green, Teesdale'.

Team members arriving at Cow Green just before 4pm helped to organise the control vehicle. The aerial was erected with careful attention to positioning and securing its guy ropes to protect it against the high winds which were predicted for later in the evening. The electric generator was also set up to provide power for the control vehicle's radios and computer systems.

Search groups were selected and members of each group were allocated tasks (navigator, medic or radio communications) and collected medical kit and group shelters. Group leaders were briefed about the incident and then allocated search areas. The scenario for the exercise was as follows:

*A very experienced and well equipped walker called James W. Smith had set off at 1pm to walk to the trig. point on Meldon Hill with an unnamed companion who's hill walking experience was unknown. Mr. Smith's car had been found at Cow Green Dam and an attempt to contact him by text had been made (texts messages are more likely to be successful than voice communication in areas of poor reception). At 3.30pm a walker arriving at the Cow Green car park had seen flashing lights on the ridge of Meldon to the west of Cow Green. Given this information the search manager decided that we would start our search on the ridge on the east side of Meldon.*

One of the team members present was a SARDA dog handler, Tony High. I was given the task of going out with Tony and his dog 'Isla' ahead of the search groups to try and find the missing walkers. This is normal practice as the presence of the scent of the search groups could distract the dog. My task would be to navigate for Tony and maintain communication with the search manager.

We were driven to the west end of Cow Green dam. Tony instructed me to keep track of our position and to stay behind him to avoid distracting Isla. It was exciting setting off into the dark. The first thing I did was to establish radio communications with 'control' to ensure that my radio was working. As a relatively inexperienced team member I was concerned that I would be able to fulfil the task expected of me. I followed Tony counting steps (for myself on a gentle uphill slope it takes about 126 paces, counted as 63 double paces, to cover 100 metres), using my compass to determine the direction we were moving. I was also looking for any landmarks on the ground which I could use to confirm our position on the map. Tony was focussed on what Isla was doing, encouraging her and keeping her working ahead and to right and left as we progressed. He also had to formulate a search pattern which had Isla working into the wind to give



Team members preparing medical kit at the 'incident site'.

her a better chance of detecting the casualties. The weather was not ideal for Isla: it was misty, drizzling and the wind was variable in strength and direction

but Tony persevered. We worked our way uphill, checking out shake-holes as we went.



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Stretcher assembled ready for use, with group shelter containing casualty in background.

After about an hour there was a sudden increase in visibility and steadying of the wind. Isla almost immediately changed her behaviour and started moving ahead with purpose. Tony knew she was onto something and called out to encourage her. We followed her and a few minutes later arrived at a shake-hole containing two, sad shivering figures. We greeted them, confirmed their identities as the people we were looking for and quickly erected a group shelter around them. A quick medical inspection identified one broken

ankle and two cases of mild hypothermia. A radio message was sent to the exercise controller identifying the local and condition of the casualties along with a request for specific first aid equipment to be sent to our location. Team members and the required equipment arrived quite quickly. The 'casualty' with the broken ankle had the injury splinted with a vacuum splint and was placed in a casualty bag (heavy duty sleeping bag) and loaded onto a stretcher. The other 'casualty' was suffering from mild exposure and after re-warming in the group shelter he felt fit enough to walk out.



Search Dog 'Isla' enjoying a well-earned rest in a group shelter.

The injured casualty and stretcher were then carried for about two kilometres to a helicopter landing area. This required quite an effort as each team member was carrying a full load of personal kit and extra first aid kit as well as having to help with the stretcher carry. The rain and rising wind was getting pretty serious. There was also number of peat gullys to cross. As a result progress was slow, but steady.



On reaching the designated landing zone a search of the ground took place to identify and remove any potentially harmful debris. Team members and kit were assembled in a designated safe area, an imaginary helicopter arrived and was landed very skilfully, the two casualties were 'loaded' onto it and it 'departed' leaving the rescuers to find their own way to the Cow Green dam and transport back to the control

Andy Murray Incident Site Commander organising the helicopter landing site.

vehicle for the next



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part of the exercise.

Phase two of the exercise was to camp/bivouac and await further instructions. Different people had different approaches to this. I set up a small tent flysheet, and got under it to cook a meal and a hot drink. After doing this I tried to relax, relying on the clothing I was wearing to stop me from getting too cold. In such a situation time passes slowly and it is not easy to sleep. The wind speed steadily increased to near gale force, making sleep more difficult due to the sound of the flysheet flapping in the wind. I was also concerned over the security of the tent pegs.

By 1am. the tent was getting seriously battered and I was beginning to wonder if it would survive. Fortunately a call came for us to pack our kit and assemble at the control vehicle. A decision was taken to terminate the exercise. The weather conditions were continuing to deteriorate, roads were becoming flooded. There was a concern that we could become trapped in Upper Teesdale and be unable to respond to emergencies that might occur elsewhere in our area. As it turned out there was some serious flooding between Cow Green and Middleton which caused team members some difficulty on the drive back to our base in Barnard Castle.

Back at base it took quite a while to unload the wet kit from the team vehicles and place it in the drying room to dry. This was followed by a team debrief to identify any problems which had occurred and identify any ways in which our operating procedures could be improved. By four am we were free to head our separate ways home.

ERIC GILHOOLEY



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### Team Involvement at York Floods

With the predicated weather conditions of heavy rain from storm Frank after Christmas on top of the rain deposited from storms Abigail, Barney, Desmond and Eva, a Silver command was set up to coordinate Mountain Rescue resources within North Yorkshire in the event of help needed if major areas were flooded.

TWSMRT declared our availability with a number of Swift Water Rescue Technicians and Bankside trained personnel, together one of our 4x4's, with our raft and rescue sled.

As you will have seen on national news, York suffered heavy flooding in and around the city centre, and Silver command activated Mountain Rescue resources.

We deployed on Boxing night and arrived at the RV point at a York school to find massed resources of team members, 4x4s, boats and rafts from seventeen Mountain Rescue teams.



A few of the many Mountain Rescue vehicles

We booked in with Bronze command, and were tasked with house and welfare checks on residents in various parts of flooded York, to see if they were safe or required evacuation to the welfare rescue centers.

We evacuated about fifteen persons and a dog from their flooded houses.



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In action early morning of the 27<sup>th</sup> December



We were tasked back to York on the 28<sup>th</sup> December.

This time we were tasked with getting engineers across a flood to inspect the electric motors and control systems which operate the River Foss flood barriers.

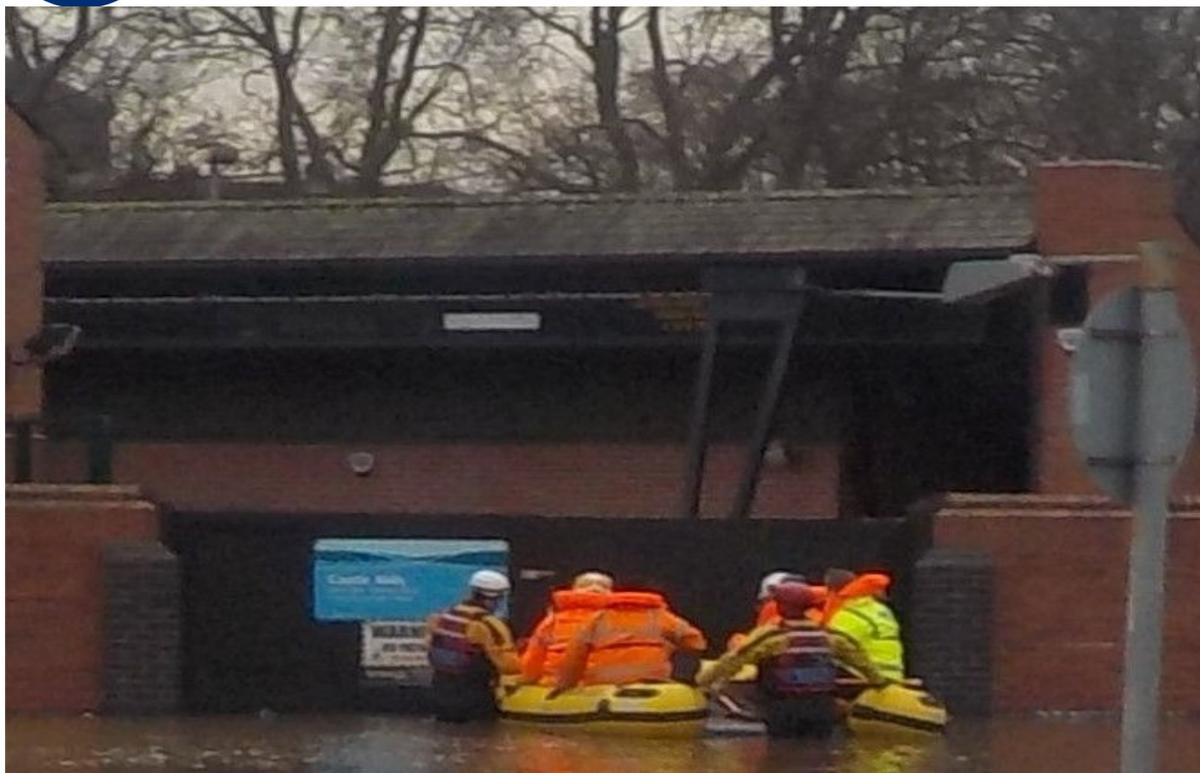
The compound for the motors were under one metre of flood water.



The pump-house compound



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Accessing the compound



Returning the Engineers



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We successfully completed the tasking and returned the engineers back to dry land. The tasking attracted a good level of media interest, and one team member featured on BBC Radio Five Live giving an excellent task briefing and another team member gave a live radio broadcast, together with the event being filmed by a Belgian TV crew.

It was heartening to see the involvement of Mountain Rescue teams from across the country, from as far away as Dartmoor. Equally the people of York helped and provided the teams with food and drinks, especially the gentleman who ran a mobile coffee business who kept teams in drinks and cake at no cost.

### TEAM CALL OUTS OCT 15 - JAN 16



08:00 27/12/2015	Assisted North of Tyne MR Team in search for missing 59 year old female in the Ponteland area of Northumberland.
23:00 26/12/2015 16:00 28/12/2015	The team spent 30 plus hours at the flooding in York on Sunday rescuing people from their flooded houses.
13:00 20/12/2015	Team called to search for a missing kayaker who had been seen in difficulties by a member of the public on the River Tees in Winston. The team were stood down whilst assembling when the kayaker was confirmed safe and well.
16:00 12/12/2015	The Team were asked by the North East Ambulance Service to provide a 4 wheel drive ambulance and crew to assist during a period of heavy snow. We crewed one of our Land Rovers based in the Durham area with a doctor, advanced medic and blue light qualified driver for 24 hours from Saturday afternoon. The Team treated around 20 patients and transported several of them to hospitals in the North East.
16:00 05/12/2015	Team assembled in case assistance was required with the floods in Durham or neighbouring counties. In the event we were not called upon to take any action and returned to standby at about 22.00 as local river levels peaked.
03:30 28/11/2015	Team went on standby at 03:30am to assist in the search of a missing male near the River Gaunless in Bishop Auckland. The missing person was found safe and well and the team was stood down without callout.