



Teesdale & Weardale Search & Mountain Rescue Team

Annual Review 2025





Teesdale & Weardale Search & Mountain Rescue Team

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

Any comments or newsletter contributions should be sent to newsletter@twsmrt.org.uk



Teesdale & Weardale Search & Mountain Rescue Team

Team Leader's report

John Little



It's been a busy year for the Team in many different ways. We have been called out over 70 times which is a new record for the Team. In February we had our longest and highest profile search for many years. We've worked alongside NEAS, Durham Police, other NESRA Teams, DDFRS, The Coast Guard, GNAS and other organisations. Our media profile has increased and a strong relationship in particular with the police media team has help ensure we get credited where credit is due. We have taken on some new recruits and have high hopes that we'll have 4 new Hill Team members in the near future. Our latest recruitment round has started well and we have lots of very strong applicants to choose from. We also came together with our families for a Team BBQ and to receive the High Sherrif Award from the High Sherrif of Durham. This year we have been fortunate to benefit from socks from Bridgedale, cleaning and waterproof materials from Nikwax and personal care kits and personal care kits from RRT.

Behind the scenes we've also progressed in a large number of areas. We have brought about half the hill team up a standard where they can complete in-water searches and have purchased the necessary equipment for them to do so. This will greatly enhance the searching we can do in the wet areas of the county. We have started the move to becoming a Charitable Incorporated Organisation – this has not been a simple process and a number of Team Members have put in a significant amount of work to progress this- this work continues and we will keep the Team updated on progress. We've run both winter training and water training in Scotland (not at the same time). We've replaced one of the old bell stretchers and a number of Team members have completed off road and blue light driver training. We have worked to clearly delegate out responsibilities and by doing so have freed up time at our committee meetings. While the equipment, vehicles and finances have all produced challenges over the course of the year they are in good order.

Work continues on a number of key areas including a vehicle replacement strategy and documenting the risks the Team faces and associated mitigations. We have DBS checked about half the team and will continue to progress this over the next 12 months. We have also started the process of migrating data from the Team website to an externally managed system.

I would like to thank everyone in the leadership team for their hard work and support. There's a huge amount goes on behind the scenes within the leadership team and having a committed team to both bounce ideas off and carry the load has been essential. I would also like to thank the Team's leads who are also the Team's trustees – as we would expect every single one of them has stepped up to the mark and completed their role to a very high standard. I would also like the thank the Team members who have stepped up and supported our leads – this support is essential to making many of our leads roles manageable when we're all busy people. I would particularly like to thank Sarah Hall who stepped down as Treasurer and Fundraising lead part way through the year and Pete Bell who is stepping down from the Committee after I believe 20 years having held a number of roles including Group Leader, Team Leader and Deputy Team Leader and Dave Wigham for tireless work looking after our vehicles and drivers. I would also like to thank every single Team member – the demands this year have been intense – there have been challenges from parallel callouts to broken down vehicles, there's been late nights and early mornings but everyone has come together and helped where and when they can for the benefit of the community we serve.



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Deputy Team Leader / Crag Lead / Water Lead's Report

Rich Warne



If I were to use one word to describe the last Team year, that word would be 'Progressive.'

As a Team, we have seen closer and more efficient collaboration with our statutory emergency service partners, resulting in more timely callouts, appropriate deployments and ultimately a better response for our patients.

The evolution of the NEAS Special Desk has galvanized the relationship between our two organisations and resulted in a significant increase in callouts.

In order to keep-pace with this increase in activity, the Team have risen to the occasion and given more of their time and expertise than ever before. This never fails to be a humbling affair to see in action, despite twenty-eight years' experience!

In the background, things have been just as busy. Medical Lead Paul Renwick and his team have worked hard to ensure that our drugs and consumables stocks are up to date and in order, including the establishment of new analgesic options. The introduction of a new patient monitor has also been a positive addition this year.

Special thanks go to Dr Clare White who continues to input significant time and effort training our Remote Rescue Medical Technicians and preparing them for summative assessment.

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Rope and water operations have also taken significant steps forward. Thanks primarily to Training Lead Jane Ascroft, rope rescue training features as embedded learning in a significant portion of our training throughout the year, notwithstanding the subject specific evening and weekend training dedicated to this area. As a new MREW certified rope-rescue instructor, Jane has also been instrumental in assisting with the training of basic rope systems which has been of great help. This year the Team also ran it's first Safe Work at Height and Rescue course, helping bridge the gap between wilderness and industrial rescue, broadening the Team's potential scope of operations and harmonising training with partner agencies. Thanks as ever also go to Paul Renwick and his company Rescue North East for their constant support.

This approach to rope rescue training has paid dividends in terms of resilience for callouts involving a technical rescue element, with the entire Team able to safely and effectively conduct such operations rather than reliance on the skill of a number of individuals. Again, this would not be possible without the efforts and dedication of Team members, willing to learn, develop and maintain new skills.

In order to support rope operations and rescues in general, this year we implemented a project to replace one of our ageing Bell Stretchers with a lightweight split titanium stretcher. This new stretcher compliments our existing titanium model and means that both primary response vehicles now carry the lightweight variant, saving a whopping 20+ kg each.

Water operations is possibly the area in which the greatest steps forward have been taken.

This year, the Team took the decision to return to in-water operations in order to provide more options for search and rescue activities in water-margin and flood scenarios. Such a move required significant investment and involved the purchase of new PPE such as drysuits, helmets and rescue-specific water footwear to compliment equipment already in use. In October, 19 Team Members travelled to Pinkston



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Watersports in Glasgow to undertake DEFRA Module 2 Swiftwater and Flood First Responder training, certified by Rescue 3, and delivered by Rescue North East.

An excellent weekend's training was had by all, with all attendees certifying and now being able to deploy to water incidents.

To close my report for this year, I'd like to leave you with some figures taken from operational deployments. The data for this has been extracted from a rolling twelve-month period prior to the date of this report.

Of the 74 callouts in this period:

18% involved water operations

16% required rope-rescue operations

54% involved team members providing medical care, to a total of 44 patients

Thanks again to all in the Team for everything you do, and to your families and employers for giving you up time after time. Here's to another great year.

Deputy Team Leader (Operations) Report

Paul Fell



This year has seen a large number of callouts, including a five-day multi-agency search for Jenny Hall, the team has provided ongoing search and rescue support across the area.

Attendance at Wednesday night training and Sunday exercises remains strong—thanks to all who facilitate these sessions.

We welcomed two new duty controllers, and one search manager completed introductory training while another finished the advanced search manager training.

Thank you to everyone who supported me in this role over the past year.



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Deputy Team Leader's Report

Scott Bisset



This year I have taken on two team jobs, Welfare officer/lead and Deputy team leader.

Regarding the welfare role, I've been doing quite a bit of research on it including talking to other teams to see what they do and what I found was that, although most other teams have a welfare officer, it's not an area where they're particularly proactive. However, to that end, I have put a small team together and I will be talking to the whole team about this in the very near future.

As DTL I've been looking at various aspects of the team including fund raising where I've been working alongside Hamish to upgrade the notice board at High Force and the collection stone at the Dale's centre in Stanhope. I've actually personally started work on refurbishment of the stone which has consisted of removing the out of date brass plaque, sanding the old paint off the stone and enlarging the hole so coins don't get stuck in it anymore, hopefully this will be completed soon.

I've also been investigating other Teams' support groups, an area where we are sadly lacking at the moment compared with them. Working with John and the other DTL's, we hope to start putting that right very shortly.

I've recently completed inspecting all the portable electrical appliances in the base, however if you come across anything I've missed, i.e. something with an out of date sticker on then please let me know.

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Driver familiarisation is also still ongoing (although not enough people are coming forward), so if you need or want a bit of a refresher on using team vehicles, even if you've been driving for a while, please give me a shout and I'll be happy to help. We really need to start treating our fleet with a little more respect.



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Deputy Team Leader (Resources)

Mike Needham



As we near the end of my first year as a deputy team leader for the team it feels as though the last 12 months has passed in a matter of weeks. I would like to start with an apology to team trustees, members and support team for my limited input during my first six months in position. Unfortunately, due to a change in roles in my occupation time has been very limited with which to do anything additional to support the team.

I would like to thank in particular Dave Wigham and Eric Gilhooley (our vehicle officer and equipment officer). These two roles are extremely important in maintaining the operational capabilities of our team and are very different however both carry significant importance and come with many significant challenges.

Over the last 12 months, Dave has worked tirelessly to ensure that our vehicle fleet has been maintained at its optimum to support the team in delivery of the emergency responses that we all attend. The role of vehicle officer is not always recognised fully for how demanding it can be. Over the last year alpha, mobile one, mobile two have all required significant work to be performed on them by the police workshops. Some of this work is avoidable and could be addressed by notifying the vehicle officer or myself, we need to be more proactive in identifying issues, to assist in reducing the impact to our operational needs because of short notice servicing or repairs.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank Dave for his efforts over the last year and also the support provided by Ewan (Dave's son) for the time they've committed to the team ensure vehicles are in the right location for work to be performed or for operational needs. Some of you may be aware that Dave has taken the decision to stand down from the role of vehicle officer and the team. As such, I would like to offer my support assuming that I am re-elected by the membership to the new incoming vehicle officer.

As we set out following the AGM of 2024, the vehicle officer and leadership have discussed a number of options concerning a strategy around the replacement of Team vehicles. This strategy is still being developed and is supported by James Chillcott in developing a financial spend plan for the capital expenditure associated with continual vehicle replacement on a rolling period of approximately 10 to 15 years life. The vehicle working group is still to be established outside of the leadership and I'd welcome any support in 2026 that any team members may be able to offer. This is to ultimately secure our vehicles and maintained operations for the next 10 years.

With regards to Team Equipment I'd like to thank Eric for his efforts this year in ensuring that our team members and our vehicles are fully kitted out to ensure operational readiness. Eric has taken countless hours of inspection of technical equipment something that is done on an annual basis and also require support from team members. Without these inspections we would be unable to perform on steep ground, in water or deploy in our vehicles.

This year the team has purchased new Ferno stretchers due to the discontinuation of the Bell stretcher. This will not only provide a standardised method of rescue but also alleviate some of the white burden experienced by team members on stretcher carries or stretcher drags. Over the coming year, we will need to ensure that there is resilience built-up within our Equipment department.

Thank you to all team members for your support in my first year as Deputy Team Leader, I hope to be able to build with the wider leadership in 2026, what I believe is a strong team, following a significant transition of leadership over the last 12 months.



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Equipment Lead's Report

Eric Gilhooley



Stretchers

The main focus during the year was the testing and refurbishment of our Bell stretchers by Lyon Equipment at Tebay.

Our first stretcher was away for 2 months being tested and refurbished. During this time our second Bell stretcher expired and we had to withdraw it for use in technical rescues and rely on our Ferno stretcher for that type of situation.

Fortunately we have recently purchased a Ferno Titan stretcher and this is now in service so each of our team vehicles is equipped with a fully serviceable stretcher.

Crag Kit

The crag kit bags seem to get heavier and heavier every year requiring considerable effort to move them any distance. During the year I tried to respond to this problem by re-arranging each of the crag bags as follows:

1. Take enough equipment from a crag bag to set up a single rescue line;
2. Put that equipment into a small rope bag;
3. Store the small bag within the main crag bag;
4. When crag kit has to be carried any distance the two bags can be separated and carried by two people.

Training

John encouraged NESRA to organize a PPE checking course for NESRA members. This was held at our Sniperley base on 1st June, led by Rob Tortoishell of SAR Ltd, also a member and former leader of Oldham MRT. It was an excellent, informative course. Three of our team members attended and passed the course so now we have four team members certified to check crag kit.



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Training Lead's Report

Jane Ascroft



During the last 12 months training has run smoothly with training sessions being well attended and of good quality. Training continued to run on every other Wednesday evening and on the third Sunday in the month, except for April and December where the Sunday training was brought forward to avoid Easter and Christmas.

We had 6 Core Wednesday evening training sessions each running twice in the last 12 months. These were Equipment, Medical 1, Medical 2, Water, Steep Ground and Search Skills. Thanks to Rich Warne, James Chilcott, Mark Sauer, Jamie Siddle and our medical trainers for delivering these sessions.

For the remaining Wednesday evenings we ran less formal, non-core sessions on different topics including IT & comms, 10 second triage, canine first aid, night navigation and dealing with crashed aircraft which encouraged Team members to attend the sessions and also gave less experienced Team members an opportunity to deliver some training.

We have had 12 Sunday exercises since the last AGM. 5 of these have been "Fell" exercises, 2 have been at Hamsterley Forest, 1 at Deepdale Offroad, 2 at Bowlees in Teesdale and we have had one medical weekend and one crag weekend. Many thanks to everyone who has helped to organise a Sunday exercise and also to the local landowners and gamekeepers for allowing us access to their land for these exercises.

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We had the bi-annual winter training weekend in Scotland in February 2025 which saw 12 Team members travel to Aviemore to practice snow skills and avalanche transceiver work.

We have re-introduced formal water training at DEFRA Mod 2 level (Swiftwater & flood first responder) and 20 Team members travelled up to Pinkston Water Sports Centre in Glasgow in October 2025 for a very successful weekend of water training.

Six new trainees joined us in January 2025 to start their training. Unfortunately two have since left us but we wish the remaining four the best of luck for their forthcoming assessment. At the time of writing this we are busy recruiting for a larger than usual intake in January 2026.



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Treasurer's Report

James Chilcott



The treasurer role for most of the year was carried out by Sarah but she had to step down at end of June due to time constraints. I volunteered to take on the role for the remainder of the year with aim of continuing into the coming year if the workload seemed manageable. Fortunately, our bookkeeper Alison processes most of the day-to-day finance elements for the team so the remaining treasurer work does feel like a role I can continue with. Steve continues to provide assistance and explanations of historical finance decisions especially around insurance so our thanks for that help.

The formal year accounts for August 2024 - July 2025 will have been circulated in advance of AGM but if there are any queries then myself and Jane are happy to answer. Jane has prepared them and co-ordinated with an external examiner Lisa and I am happy to report they reflect the team internal financial reporting. They will be submitted to the charities commission if accepted at the AGM.

Key takeaways from accounts this year:

- Financial position remains stable and no concerns about our ability to meet our operational running costs in the coming year.
- Income sources remain widespread which is good for the charity as means very low impact if one source was to cease.
- Opening net assets August 2024 was 281,391 and closing net assets July 2025 was 302,071 so an increase of nearly 21k.
- Of the net assets 260,430 is cash, spread across different financial institutions and we are trying to earn best interest we can on those funds.

Although net assets did increase this year I should mention there was a one off high profile search with significant family and public fundraising in recognition raising around £26,000. If this was removed, then team traditional income/donations/fundraising would have been around £5,000 less than our expenditure/depreciation in year. We also had a higher spend than income in the previous financial year. Fortunately, our reserves are sufficient that we could see out several years at this expenditure vs income level but with some significant vehicle replacement costs in the next 5 years we can't be complacent and will need to keep pushing on fundraising side whilst keeping control of overall team expenditure.

Hon. Secretary's Report

Sarah Broadbent



Many thanks to all who have supported me in my first year as Secretary. I have spent the year getting to grips with the team's administrative duties, although not glamorous, there is more than first meets the eye.

Following advice from MREW we have identified the need for a Designated Safeguarding Lead and a GDPR Designated Officer, which I have adopted into the Secretary Role. Thanks to Jane Ascroft who is exploring options for incorporating these elements into our training regime.



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MRSDE Lead's Report

Des Toward



The last year has seen the Team's dogs and handlers continue to train on a regular basis, locally most weeks and attending national training monthly.

The Team currently has 2 operational dog teams that can be used on callouts. We also have 3 dogs in training.

As always thanks must go to our regular dogs bodies, the Team in general for their continued support and local land owners/game keeper's for continued access to training area's.

Finally I would like to wish Search Dog Tarn a happy and long retirement.

Press & PR Lead's Report

Daniel Taylor



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In the past year the social media team have tried to complete these 3 main objectives

- Increase followers
- Increase content interaction
- Increase wider reach

In my opinion these objectives have been met or surpassed and I'd like to thank the whole social media team for their efforts in this.

Some key stats for Facebook are:

- 2 million views over a 1 year period
- An additional 2200 followers a 451% increase
- 28.9k content interaction
- 244 link clicks

Some key stats for Instagram

- 15,800 views over a 1 year period
- An additional 110 followers
- 641 content interactions

In terms of reach we have been highlighted by local newspapers/northern echo and also multiple times by the BBC news.

Interestingly this year due to our wider reach and more follows we are not going to newspapers but they are now coming to us.



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This is a great position to be in and shows how the Social Media engagement is progressing.

I'd like to take big thanks as well to miles who last Xmas wrote all pre registered posts for national event days. This has gone down extremely well with the public and is the main reason for our content link follows.

The links follows do not see high at 244 compared to other numbers but these are mainly mental health related posts and I'd like to think through one of these clicks that we have helped someone on the right track.

I wish the team a continued success into 2026 and hope that you can all keep taking photos as this is pivotal to our success on social media.

Thank you to you all.

Fundraising Lead's Report

Hamish Carrick



Thanks to Sarah Hall for her work in handing over the fundraising role and responsibilities, and for remaining contactable through the year for any questions.

There are some more large purchases in the next year, so a structured approach to raising both specific and general team maintenance funds is being sought. We have been advised on a number of charitable trusts to apply for, and some guidance for doing this, based on a friend of a member of the public that we were called out to earlier in the year.

The Great North Run runners fundraising for the team made an amazing effort yet again, and the team will look to charitable places for next year. If anyone is interested, please let me know.

Final street collection of the year planned for 5th December in Durham, typically there is good turn out for this. The team will do the three street collections again next year, as well as any other opportunities team members would like to get involved in.

The team has been invited to be Middleton farmers market charitable pen for 2026. This means they will put out some posts about the team, include us in their posters and materials, and we can have a stall each month to fundraise. If anyone has any ideas for different things we can do at the market stand please let me know.



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Search Management Lead's Report

Pete Bell



My thanks for all the help I've had over the years I've been in post, as in everything we do, search management is very much a team game.

Callouts this year have significantly increased and could be the highest year ever, with a large proportion of these being NEAS assists. These bring their own search management challenges, least of which is finding the correct location and managing of the on-going information stream. These callouts are unlikely to decrease in the future, for a variety of reasons, not least of which is the recognition by NEAS that we are good at what we do.

The largest search of the year was the Jenny Hall incident.

This was a multi-team event, with teams from across NESRA, LDSAMA drones, MRSDA dogs. In-addition to Police drones, NPAS, Police off-road motorbikes, and HMCG-SAR helicopter.

Farmers, gamekeepers used their local knowledge to search areas.

Thanks are required for Durham Police for organising welfare facilities for searchers.

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It should be noted that TWSMRT search managers devoted a large number of man hours in managing the incident, including forward planning of the next day's search.

This search, as in everything we do, generated learning points for search managers and these are being worked through. However, one of which is Starlink, which we have purchased and this will give search managers internet access anywhere in the County, thus eliminating lack of internet coverage in our 'black spot areas', there are also other potential benefits which still have to be worked through. Some work for the IT and SM leads with the search managers.

Other items identified will be introduced to search managers in the very near future.

Search management is progressing at a rapid rate and search management may look somewhat different in the future, with drones, drone search software analysis, data analysis, search planning tools etc.

However, some things are unlikely to change as technology has yet to find a replacement for the Mark 1 eyeball or a dog's nose.

And finally, I am standing down from the role but know that it is in safe hands and will continue to move forward with Steve taking over.



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Canoe Group Leader's Report

Richard Williams



Richard Williams took over as Canoe Team Lead at the beginning of the year, having been a team member since 2004. The team has maintained its commitment to training, conducting two water sessions annually, one was held on the River Tees in April, with another scheduled for early November. Members also continue to participate in the required core training sessions on Wednesdays.

This year, one new member has joined the team, and three additional recruits are due for assessment in November. Most team members are now equipped with PPE. New recruits will receive their gear later in the year.

Operationally, the team has responded to several incidents. In December 2024, the Canoe Team was deployed to Darlington to search for a missing person. Sadly, the team located and assisted with the recovery of a body. In June, the team responded to two separate incidents. The first was a search of a pond in Malton for a missing person. Later that month, the team was called to Gainford following reports of a child in difficulty in the river. Despite extensive efforts, the body was later recovered by Police divers. In September, the team conducted multiple searches for a MISPER in Darlington, covering the River Skern and River Tees. Unfortunately, a body was found downstream of the designated search area after rising river levels.

Canoe Team members will attend the Module 2 training session in October alongside Hill Team members, enhancing the operational capabilities of the team.

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IT and Radio Lead

Mark Sauer



Focus for 2026: simplification, standardisation, and documentation.

My goal this year is to make our systems easier to understand, support, and hand over. If a process or tool requires a subject matter expert just to operate, we have done something wrong. This doesn't mean we should avoid complex challenges, but any complexity should be in the setup, not the maintenance. Every system we deploy should be designed with the next person in mind: it might be technically advanced, but it should always be simple to support.

Radio Network

Reliable communications remain one of our biggest operational challenges, particularly during rapid-response jobs (e.g. NEAS assists) where control may be remote and comms coverage is critical. We continue to face black spots across our area, but addressing these gaps is a priority.

This year, we established a Radio Working Group to take a structured look at our network. The group is still in its early stages but already has a clear roadmap for improvement, balancing practicality, resilience, and cost-effectiveness. Expect to see these changes during 2026.



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Zello Integration

Zello continues to be a key element in our developing comms strategy. It allows team members to maintain voice communications over mobile networks, bridging traditional radio coverage gaps and improving our link to Control when operating remotely.

The Future of Tier 3

Tier 3 remains an essential part of our radio ecosystem, but our deployment strategy is evolving. Rather than maintaining full regional coverage, which is costly and unnecessary, over 2026 Tier 3 will be targeted to areas with limited or no communication options by other means (radio, Zello, or mobile data).

D4H Implementation

D4H represents one of the most significant upcoming developments for the team, both operationally and strategically.

Deployment is expected to begin in early 2026, and D4H will replace a range of existing systems currently managed via our internal website. This move is about more than just new software; it's about protecting our data, improving resilience, and aligning with my philosophy of simplification, standardisation, and documentation.

Summary:

The coming year will see a strong focus on building systems that are simpler, smarter, and better documented, ensuring our IT and communications infrastructure is resilient, future-proof, and ready for the next batch of team members. We should, coming out of 2026, have a IT and radio network, that is in a much better position to support our team for the years to come.





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Other Team News

Over the weekend of 25/26 July 2025 TWSMRT assisted Swaledale MRT to provide medical cover at the ArdRock mountain bike event in Swaledale.

On 9th 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: John Little, Des Toward and Jane Ascroft.

Presentation of Service Certificates

At our AGM in November 2025 we presented the following Team members with long service certificates:

30-year MREW certificates:

Steve Owers

25-year MREW certificates:

Scott Bisset

20-year MREW certificates:

Tom Keenan

Anthony Tubbs

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Kings Award for Voluntary Service

We are proud to announce that TWSMRT has been awarded this year's King's Award for Voluntary Service.

The award aims to recognise outstanding work by local volunteer groups to support their communities. It was created in 2002 to celebrate Her Late Majesty The Queen's Golden Jubilee and was continued following the accession of His Majesty The King. The award is the highest award a local voluntary group can receive in the UK and is equivalent to an MBE.

For us the award reflects not only the dedication of our past and active callout members, but also those in supporting roles, including our friends and families who enable us to do what we do 24/7 365 days a year.

The team will receive the award crystal and certificate from the Lord-Lieutenant of County Durham in June 2026. In addition, two volunteers from the team will attend a Royal Garden Party at Buckingham Palace in May/June 2026, along with other recipients of this year's award.



Becoming a Trainee

Ben Hall

Around 18 months ago, I responded to a Facebook post calling for new Mountain Rescue volunteers. Since then I've embarked on a very busy, challenging, occasionally overwhelming but always enjoyable journey to earning my Red Jacket.

I am often asked what the experience has been like, so here are my answers to some of the most common questions.

How did you join and what was the selection process?

I responded to a Facebook post by Teesdale and Weardale Search & Mountain Rescue calling for new applicants in August 2024. All applicants were invited to an initial Teams call. We left feeling genuinely enthused but also in no doubt about the level of commitment the Team requires and expects.

An online navigation test and a timed local hike followed. Those longlisted attended a half-day assessment, where our navigation, teamwork, communication and stretcher-carrying skills were put to the test.

I was fortunate to be selected and, after interview, was invited to join the team as a trainee in January 2025.

Is it right for me?

One of the best quotes I remember from my training year was:

'If I wasn't on the hill doing a rescue, I'd be on the hill anyway'

First and foremost, are you the type of person who spends their time on the hills? If you have a love and a passion for the outdoors, then MR can be a fantastic way of giving back to your local and outdoor communities.

You don't need to be a mountaineer or an elite athlete to join. What you do need is to be capable of looking after yourself in any weather, day or night, sometimes for long periods at a time. Everyone on the team must be self-sufficient as others depend on it. That baseline is tested and developed throughout the training year.

Hill fitness is also important - you need to be able to get yourself to where you are needed. But we operate as a team, supporting each other and sharing the work so that everything gets done together.

What's the level of commitment?

One of the first questions we're asked as new recruits is whether we understand the time commitment and have the support of our family and work to make it possible.

Over the year, we spent around 300 hours training — roughly eight working weeks — plus travel and any callouts. It takes a lot of time and energy, and it asks a lot of the people around us.



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What do we learn?

All MR Teams require a minimum standard of competence that is expected of Hill Team members. Training is delivered in a series of evenings at base, days and nights on the fells and weekend training camps.

There's a lot to learn, and it can be overwhelming at times, but it also shows just how much knowledge and experience the Team has. Each team's training focuses on the challenges of their local area. As we cover a huge, 2,200km² patch; from high fells in the west to the coast in the east, including urban and semi-urban areas, search skills are particularly important for us.

'So Much More Than Mountains'

One of the biggest surprises for us has been just how varied the work is; it's not all mountains and hills. A lot of our callouts involve helping the police locate missing or vulnerable people in rural and semi-rural areas. We are also often called to support the ambulance service, reaching and assisting casualties who are difficult to access or extract.

Teamwork

Teamwork is at the heart of everything we do; we have to be able to rely on the person next to us. We work closely with the emergency services who depend on us to respond quickly, safely, and professionally. We couldn't do what we do without the support of local landowners, who allow us to train and operate on their land. And ultimately, we work with the community; from people in remote places, to those in towns and villages and those who love the wider outdoors.

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It is a hugely challenging and rewarding endeavour.





Teesdale & Weardale Search & Mountain Rescue Team

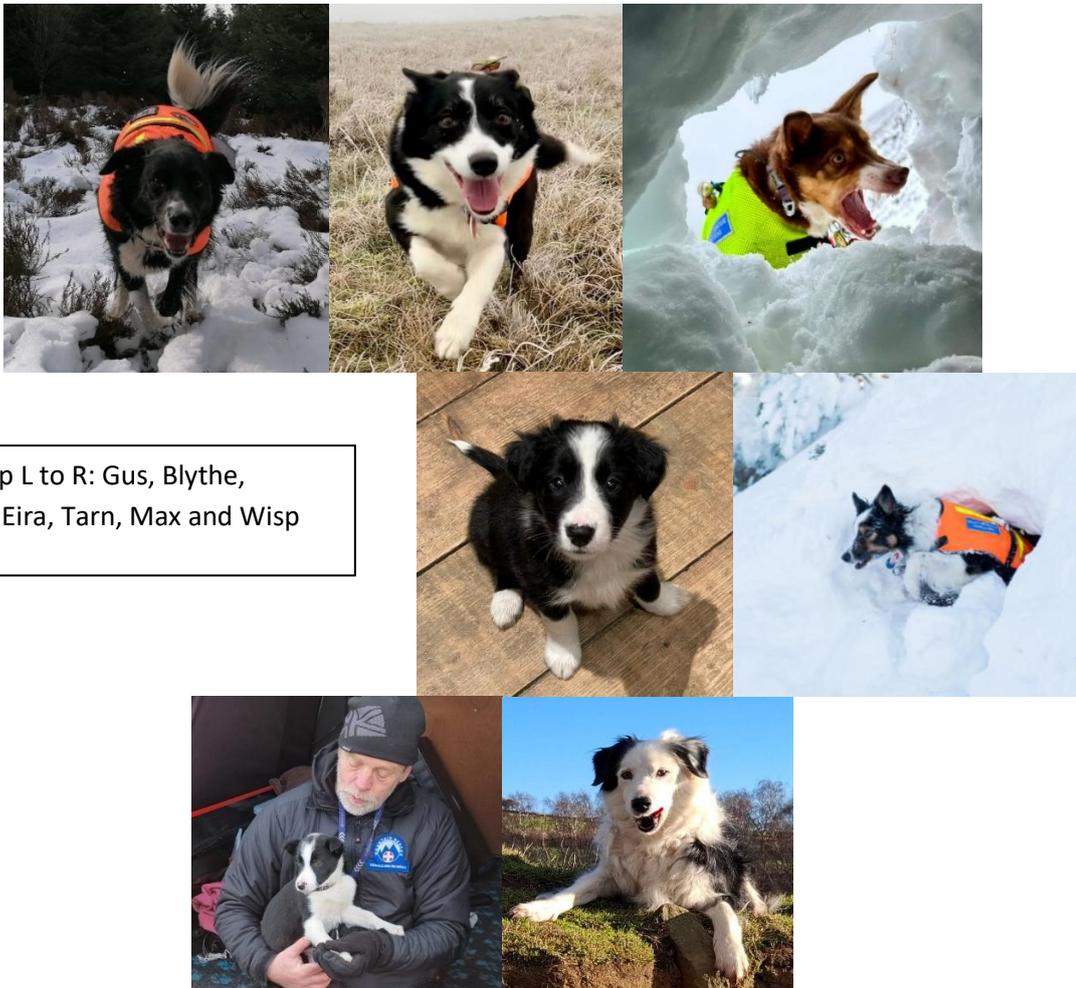
Search Dog Update

The Team has 2 operational search dogs (Gus and Blythe), 2 retired search dogs (Tarn and Wisp) and 3 trainee search dogs (Max, Bonnie and Eira). We have 4 dog handlers who in addition to being full Team members invest a significant amount of their time and money into training their dogs at a local and national level.

Much-loved search dog Tarn officially retired from duties in October 2025. Since joining TWSMRT in January 2020, Tarn has dedicated her life to helping others. Together with her handler, Tarn has:

- Responded to over 70 callouts across our region and the Lake District.
- Made two incredible finds and provided vital confirmation in support of another dog find
- Continued to train relentlessly, from local sessions with TWSMRT to national courses across the UK

We'd like to give a massive thank you to all of the dogsbodies that have assisted in training our search dogs, some in trees, some in water, some in crags - but all out in all weathers - rain, sleet, snow, ice, wind, day and night.



From top L to R: Gus, Blythe,
Bonnie, Eira, Tarn, Max and Wisp



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Some photos from a snowy February exercise.....!





Teesdale & Weardale Search & Mountain Rescue Team

Team Callouts 2025

Date	Callout number	Description
06/01/2025	1	The team called to assist Durham Police in the rescue of stranded motorists and passengers in two remote areas of Teesdale. Team evacuated motorists assisting the police in clearing stranded vehicles.
25/01/2025	2	Team called to a female with medical problems on the far side of Tunstall Reservoir. 10 Team members responded with the first on scene working with the NEAS crew to walk the female casualty out from her location to the ambulance for transportation to hospital.
29/01/2025	3	Team were called by NEAS to assist with locating a patient. The Team completed some investigations but following further information didn't physically deploy.
01/02/2025	4	Team called to Hamsterley Forest to rescue a young mountain biker who had fallen off his bike and sustained serious injuries. The team packaged the casualty and used our crag kit to safely transfer the stretcher to the track and hand the casualty over to the NEAS ambulance.
15/02/2025	5	The Team were called by NEAS to a male suffering from a medical condition at the bottom of Cauldron Snout. Twelve Team members assembled and helped him to walk him out up Cauldron Snout with the assistance of a rope. Visibility was very poor.
19/02/2025	6	Team called by the police following the discovery of a missing females car on a remote road between Eggleston and Stanhope. The team searched all day and were supported by Kirby Stephen MRT, Swale MRT and Northumbria MRT. Nothing found.
20/02/2025	7	Team continued searching the area around the car located on the Eggleston/Stanhope Road. The search in particular covered the nearby stream/river and the footpaths running out of the initial search sector. The search which had also been supported by Cleveland MRT, Swale MRT, Kirby Stephen MRT and the Northumberland MRT teams stood down at about 20:30 with nothing found.
21/02/2025	8	Team spent the day searching the tracks in Hamsterley forest as day 3 of the continued search for the missing female
22/02/2025	10	Continuation of search in Eggleston Moor area for missing female. Drone search of roads provided by Lake District MR Drones and large are of land cleared by SARDA England dogs around the missing ladies car.
22/02/2025	9	Team called to an injured cyclist in Hamsterley forest. Casualty packaged up and passed over to NEAS Ambulance.
23/02/2025	11	Day 5 of searching for missing fell runner in the Eggleston Moor area. A body was located in a remote area some distance from the car. The team helped the police access the location and then helped evacuate the body down to the road side.
27/02/2025	12	Team called to assist NEAS locate a gentleman with an ankle injury in woodland near Ebchester. Initial location and road access was within our area with the patient actually located approximately 300m into North of Tyne MRT area. Both teams attended and worked together to transport the patient across rough ground to the waiting ambulance.



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23/03/2025	13	Team called by NEAS to assist with a potentially tricky casualty extraction. The team were stood down shortly after being called when NEAS identified assistance wasn't required.
07/04/2025	14	Team called to assist NEAS for a male with a medical issue on the south side of the river opposite High Force, the team met the male and escorted to a NEAS ambulance.
17/04/2025	15	On Thursday afternoon the team were called out by Durham Police following a Garmin emergency activation in the Waskerley area. Due to no phone signal initial information was very limited. Team members arrived and treated a male with an ankle injury alone North East Ambulance Service. Once safely secured on our stretcher a single line rope system was used up a steep banking before the patient was carried to our nearby off road vehicle for transport to the waiting ambulance. 14 team members involved for four hours.
18/04/2025	16	Team called to assist for a young male with serious injuries in Hamsterley Forest. Team stood down shortly after being mobilised.
08/05/2025	17	At 9.30pm the Team were called to help search for a vulnerable female in the Peterlee area. A dozen team members responded and after a limited search the missing person was found by the police fit and well, out of the search area. The Team was stood down at 12.30am.
11/05/2025	18	The team were called out at 3.30pm to assist the police in the search for a middle aged male who had been missing for 24 hrs in the Sedgefield area. As the combined search operation was getting underway the individual concerned was found.
12/05/2025	19	Team Called out to assist NEAS In the Croxdale area for an injured patient. Patient was treated by NEAS.
16/05/2025	20	Team called to assist NEAS for an injured walker close to Bishop Auckland the team used their specialist stretcher to carry the patient to the ambulance.
19/05/2025	21	Team called by NEAS to assist with evacuation of mountain biker with shoulder injury in Hamsterley Forest. The casualty was evacuated by the Forestry Commission and looked after by the team until handed over to the NEAS crew.
21/05/2025	22	Team called by NEAS to help rescue a walker with a knee injury on steep ground near Barnard Castle. The team used a rope system to lower the injured party down to the waiting ambulance.
29/05/2025	23	Team called by the police in the small hours to search Hawthorne Dene for a missing male. Initially a dog team deployed through the hours of darkness with a number of Hill Team members joining the search from about 4:30am as it got light. A number of pieces of evidence were found and the team stood down early afternoon once the planned searches were completed to await the outcomes of parallel investigations.
11/06/2025	24	Team called by the police to search the area around Malton picnic site and the Lanchester Way. About 20 Team members searched for about 6 hours before locating a body in woodland.
20/06/2025	26	Team called to assist NEAS with a remotely located patient with a leg injury near the river in Darlington.
20/06/2025	25	Team called to search for a missing male in the River Tees at Gainford. The canoe team searched the river down stream for about a mile. The search stood down when a body was found.



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21/06/2025	30	The Team assisted a 71-year-old male walker who had collapsed. He was assessed by the team and taken to hospital for further evaluation.
21/06/2025	29	Whilst out on an event cover the Team were alerted by a passing motorist to a car that had left the road and rolled multiple times before landing upside down 30m off the road. Our team arrived within minutes, treated the female driver, and handed her over to NEAS.
21/06/2025	28	Missing walker in the Durham Dales Challenge walk, reported as missing between two checkpoints. A search was conducted between these points before the female walker was located fit and well further along the correct route.
21/06/2025	27	Team called to walker with leg injury near Low Force in Teesdale. carried patient on specialist stretcher to nearby road and passed to ambulance service.
26/06/2025	32	At the same time as the call out to High Force, the team were asked to search for a missing person in the Shildon. Eight team members attended and searched the allocated areas.
26/06/2025	31	Team called to assist the Ambulance service for a patient above High force, the team attended and transported the patient to the road.
02/07/2025	33	Team called by NEAS to evacuate an injured patient on steep ground near Houghall College on the outskirts of Durham. 12 team members attended and assisted the patient to the ambulance.
08/07/2025	34	Team called to person in the water at Barnard Castle. Team stood down enroute when person safely accounted for.
10/07/2025	36	Team placed on standby for 2 people reported stranded in water, both people successfully rescued and team stood down. 16 members available to respond if required.
10/07/2025	35	Team called this morning to assist the ambulance service with a patient down a steep embankment near Barnard Castle, the team attended and used a vacuum mattress and specialist stretcher to transport the patient to the ambulance.
12/07/2025	37	The team were called out by NEAS at 4pm today to assist an 11 year old boy who had fallen some 4m from a tree on to rocks beside the Bollihope Burn, sustaining significant leg injuries. Eight team members attended and the casualty was safely delivered to the waiting ambulance.
14/07/2025	38	Team called via police to three walkers, one elderly walking in Deepdale near Barnard Castle who had been benighted. Two local team members reached the group reasonably quickly and escorted them to the roadside and their vehicle. 4 other team members were stood down while enroute.
16/07/2025	39	Team called to assist the Police and NEAS with the evacuation of a male on the outskirts of Bishop Auckland
26/07/2025	40	The Team was called out by Durham Police on Saturday afternoon to assist in the search for a high risk missing person. Just as the team were responding the male was found by the police.
31/07/2025	41	The team were called by Durham police just before ten pm to assist with a search for a missing high risk sixteen year old. The team were initially put on standby before a decision was made at 11.20pm to undertake a limited search of the area to the west of Jubilee Bridge. Shortly after the team were mobilised we were stood down by the police further to new information about the missing persons whereabouts.



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02/08/2025	44	Team called to a female walker in the vicinity of St Johns Chapel. The team assisted NEAS, GNAS and the police.
02/08/2025	43	While packing up from a previous callout the team were alerted to an unconscious person a short way further up the road. The team assisted a NEAS paramedic to care for the patient until an ambulance arrived.
02/08/2025	42	Team called by NEAS to a walker with a leg injury in the vicinity of Gibsons cave. The team evacuated the walker to a NEAS ambulance.
07/08/2025	45	Team briefly on standby to assist the police in the area of Hawthorne Dene. Team stood down when Team assistance confirmed as not required.
11/08/2025	47	The team were briefly put on standby in relation to an injured male in the Blanchland area.
11/08/2025	46	The team were called at midday to assist a female patient in her mid sixties with a lower back injury in the Sheraton area. Team stood down once advised that NEAS / HART had completed extraction.
13/08/2025	48	Team called out by Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service following reports of a teenager last seen entering the water at Newton Cap Viaduct. Call-out initiated with canoe team on standby. Stood down as first team members arrived on scene with all persons safe and accounted for. Eight team members and two vehicles for 30 minutes.
14/08/2025	49	The team was called out on Thursday afternoon to a report of an elderly male unable to continue on a walk on Edmondbyers Common. & team members attended and after assessing the gentleman we were able to transport him off the fell in our 4x4 back to his car.
20/08/2025	51	The team were asked at 8:30 pm on Wednesday night to help search for a high risk missing person around Hamsterley Forest. 18 team personnel searched, alongside police officers, police drones and a police helicopter. The person was found safe by police on the edge of the forest, after which time the team was stood down.
20/08/2025	50	The Team was called out earlier today by Durham Police to assist in a search for a missing male in the Pelton area. Sadly as we were assembling the police located a body.
05/09/2025	52	The team were called by NEAS to help locate and move a 30 year old female who had fallen from her bike near Sedgfield. As the team were assembling it became clear that our help was not in fact required. The team were stood down.
09/09/2025	53	Team called by police to search for a missing elderly male. The male was located by a member of the public in an area the team were progressing towards. The Team treated the man and transported him in a team vehicle to the waiting ambulance.
14/09/2025	54	Team called by NEAS to a biker in Hawthorne Dene on the Durham coast with a leg injury. While GNAS, HART and NEAS paramedics treated the casualty the team evacuated the casualty out of the steep sided dene and then along the path to the waiting ambulance.
18/09/2025	56	Team called by NEAS to injured mountain biker in Hamsterley Forest. The rescue involved lowering the stretcher down some steep ground before handing the casualty over to NEAS for transportation to hospital.



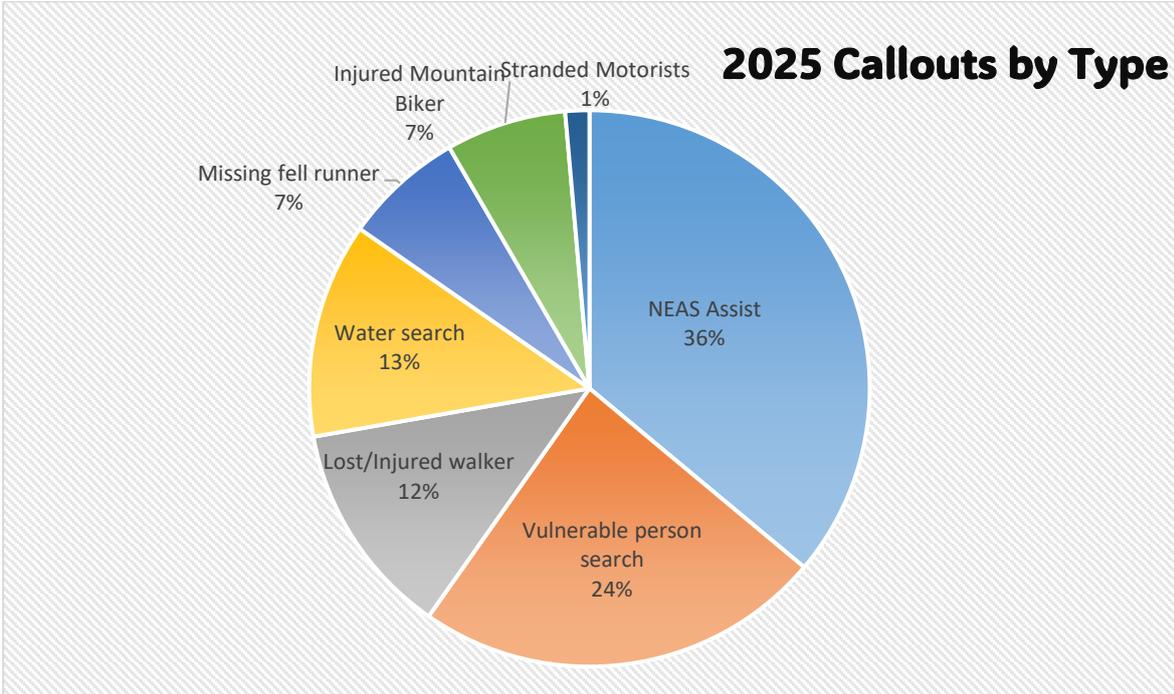
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18/09/2025	55	Team requested to search the South Park area of Darlington and the River Skern for a vulnerable missing female. The Canoe Team searched about 2km down the river while foot teams searched adjacent ground. Nothing found and search stood down at about 9pm.
19/09/2025	57	Search continued in Darlington with a team dog and the Canoe Group searching the Skern and the Tees alongside hill teams searching the general area. Nothing found.
23/09/2025	58	Team called by NEAS to injured horse rider in remote location.
26/09/2025	59	At the request of Durham police the canoe team searched the river Skerne in Darlington again in the continued search for the missing female. Nothing found.
28/09/2025	60	We were called by NEAS just after 5pm to assist an elderly male who had fallen down an embankment near Crimdon Dene and injured his leg. Eight team members responded and safely moved to casualty to the top of the embankment, followed by a 1300m carry to the waiting ambulance.
10/10/2025	61	Team called today to search for missing man in Craghead, the team and one search dog from MRSDE started searching allocated areas, the missing person was located alive and well by a member of the public.
11/10/2025	62	Team called by the police at 22:00 to search for a missing walker with a flat phone battery in Hamsterley Forest. The team pieced together a picture of events and following up on the precise instructions given to the walker by passing cyclist the walkers shouts were heard at about 1am. The walker was subsequently located deeply embedded in a thicket, safely extracted and walked to a track for collection.
20/10/2025	63	Team called by the police just before 3am to assist with the search for a missing elderly male in the Durham City area. The police requested the Team delay their deployment so the police could complete further enquiries first. The missing male was subsequently found before the Team deployed.
01/11/2025	64	The team were called at 8pm to assist a male who had got his foot and lower leg stuck in rocks at Bollihope. As the team were deploying the individual's companions managed to free him and escort him to the waiting ambulance.
12/11/2025	65	The Team were called via the police to walker lost on the moor in very wet weather between the A66 and Baldersdale. The Team approached from both the north and the south and located the casualty in a remote location a good distance from any track or road. After an assessment and she was walked off the fell down to Baldersdale and transported back round to her vehicle in Bowes.
13/11/2025	66	Team called by NEAS at 22:50 to help locate an injured casualty somewhere in the Bishop Auckland area. Fortunately the casualty was located by a member of the public while investigations were ongoing.
15/11/2025	67	The team were asked to assist with the rescue of a young lady trapped in a capsized kayak in the river Tees, at Barnard Castle. Unfortunately, despite multiple agencies in attendance, the lady did not survive. Our thoughts are with her family and friends at this time.
06/12/2025	68	The team were called shortly before midnight following reports of a person in the Tees. The team provided assistance to the police and DDFRS.
07/12/2025	69	Team put on standby for about an hour in response to a missing female from near Consett. Team stood down when the missing female made contact from a place of safety.



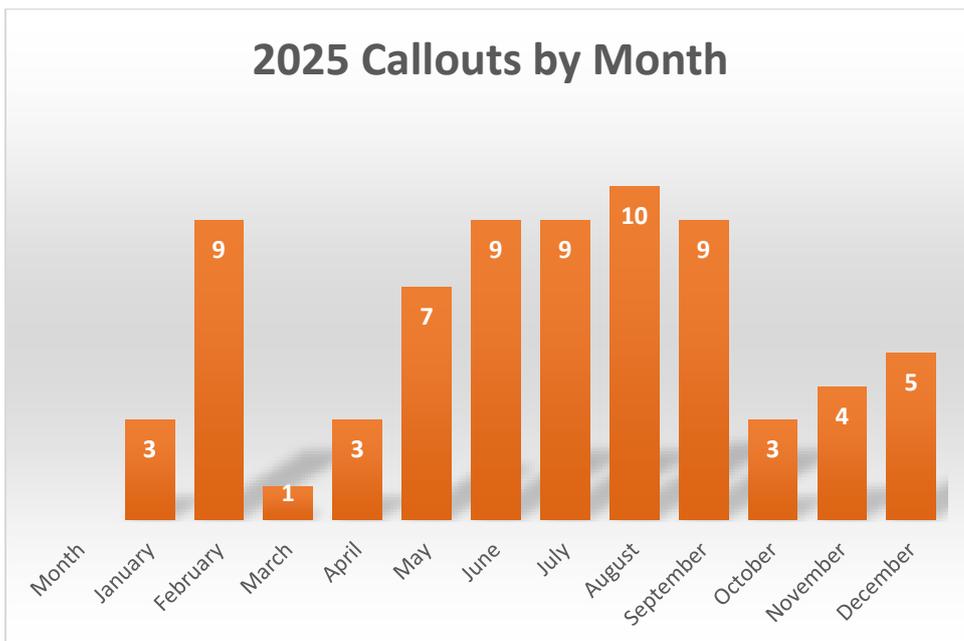
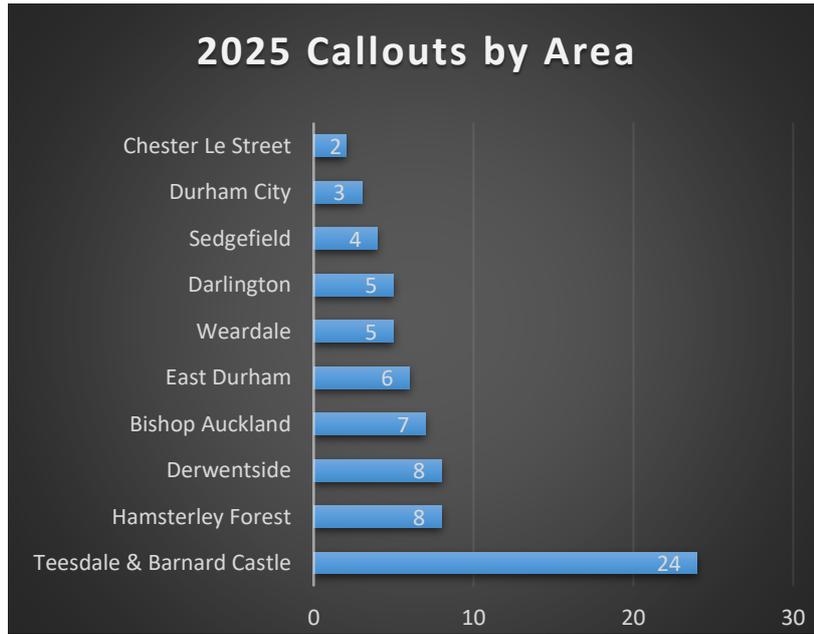
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19/12/2025	70	The team were briefly put on standby for a missing person in the Chester Le Street area. The individual was found by the police shortly after the team were contacted.
20/12/2025	71	Team called by the police to search along the disused railway line from Bishop Auckland for a vulnerable male. The team were stood down while assembling when the missing male was located near his home address.
23/12/2025	72	Team called to assist NEAS for a patient with a leg injury down a track. Team attended and used specialist equipment to move the patient to the awaiting ambulance





Teesdale & Weardale Search & Mountain Rescue Team





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And finally, one of our trainees found a contender for the deepest bog in Teesdale on our March exercise.....



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Did you know TWSMRT is a charity, run entirely by volunteers operating 24/7 365 days a year across the whole of County Durham?

We receive no government funding and rely wholly on donations from the communities we serve across the county, from the high fells to our towns and cities.

If you would like to make a donation this is our JustGiving page:

<https://www.justgiving.com/twsmt>



Photo on front cover – A training exercise above Weardale, February 2025

The Chris Scott Search & Mountain Rescue Centre, Lanchester Road, Durham, DH1 5RA
website www.twsmt.org.uk
Registered Charity No. 508877