

KESWICK MOUNTAIN RESCUE TEAM

CALL-OUT

THE FIRST
50
YEARS

George Bott

Updated by Brian Martland
to include the years 1997-2005



April 24, 1946, wasn't the best of days for fell walking or rock climbing.

On Tophet Bastion, Great Gable, two climbers were tackling Shark's Fin. One was Claude Elliott, headmaster of Eton; his companion was Wilfrid Noyce, later to be a member of John Hunt's successful Everest team.

A gust of wind blew Noyce off his holds. He fell on to a ledge, with one of his legs broken. Elliott went for help to the Scafell Hotel, where he found experienced climbers James Yule and Bobby Files, who were willing to help.

Armed with medical supplies, a stretcher and food, they set off to the scene of the accident. En route, they met Horace Westmorland, a local climber who had recently returned to his native county from Canada. The three men and three others who had heard of the incident began the difficult task of evacuating Noyce from his precarious ledge.

The loaded stretcher was gradually eased up the rock face for some 200 feet, a complicated and exhausting manoeuvre which took three and a half hours. It was then lowered down a gully and eventually down 1500 feet of scree to the Sty Head track and so to Wasdale Head.

The rescuers had been at work for twenty-one hours, much of the time without food and in darkness. A support group and an R.A.F. rescue team had failed to make contact.

Colonel Westmorland was seriously disturbed at the lack of any organised rescue service. The police were responsible for the recovery of bodies but had no statutory obligation to help injured climbers or walkers - nor were they trained or equipped for such rescues. Westmorland was surprised at how quickly the police and the support group had given up the search.

"Rusty", as he was widely known, decided something positive must be done: his background and career made him the ideal person to initiate the formation of a properly organised mountain rescue team.

Born in Penrith in 1886, he went up his first fell at the age of four; eighty years later, he proved he was still capable of tackling a difficult route by climbing Pillar Rock in Ennerdale.

At the age of twenty-three, he emigrated to Canada where he worked as a surveyor and continued to climb and explore in the Rockies. He joined the Canadian army and, in a military career that spanned over thirty years, he served in both world wars. He returned to Cumbria in 1945, where he lived (latterly at Threlkeld) until his death in 1984 at the age of ninety-eight.

He was a familiar figure in Keswick, always smartly dressed, his boots polished, his moustache neatly trimmed, his Austrian hat set at a jaunty angle - ever the ex-soldier and lifelong mountaineer.

He earned his nickname from an incident during his service with the Canadian army. A visiting general spotted some rust on the harness of one of Westmorland's horses. That night, the Commanding Officer ordered drinks all round and said, "Rusty will pay." The nickname stuck and from that time he was seldom known as anything but Rusty.

For twenty-seven years, he remained executive head of the team he founded, retiring from the position in 1975. At times the colonel over-ruled the climber: he could be autocratic and authoritarian, cherishing the idea of running the Team on army lines. At the A.G.M. in 1950, he proposed the Team leader should be designated "Captain", a suggestion that was not universally popular and was quietly abandoned.

Following the Noyce rescue and inspired by Jim Cameron's formation of a rescue team at Coniston in April 1947, Rusty decided that Keswick and district needed a trained and suitably equipped group of local walkers and climbers who were willing to help anyone in trouble on the nearby fells.

He gathered an unofficial group of volunteers, acutely aware that the official rescuers, the police, were inadequate. The departure from the town of several of the volunteers prompted Rusty to write an appeal in the *Keswick Reminder* of 21 November 1947 asking for more names of willing "climbers, fell walkers, young shepherds, young quarrymen and others." For anyone worried about loss of earnings during a rescue, Rusty pointed out that reimbursement up to £1 was available from national sources which later would be claimed from the rescued individual or their family and friends. It is to the credit of Keswick employers that no such claims were made.

It was essential, wrote Rusty, "that the volunteers should meet at least once indoors for discussion of methods and equipment and also carry out a practical evacuation of a patient on the crags for training and demonstration." It is obvious that neither Rusty nor anyone else had the slightest idea of just how far the Team was to develop over the next fifty years.



*Rusty in festive mood;
Val Nixon listens attentively*

By February 1948, some thirty names were on the list, mainly from Keswick and its immediate neighbourhood but including two from Cleator Moor and Wasdale. Among the pioneers were several doctors and such well-known Keswickians and Borrowdalians as Sandy Badrock, Frank Barnes, Treeby Bolton, Stan Edmondson, Pat Howarth, Stanley Watson and the Fisher twins, George and Richard.

At a meeting in the Royal Oak Hotel on 14 February 1948, Rusty Westmorland outlined the problems of mountain rescue in the Borrowdale area and chaired a session of questions and discussion. It was decided that the executive of the proposed team would be leader (or president), secretary, treasurer and a committee of six. Rusty, not surprisingly, took



*Rusty as "barrow-boy"
on Kern Knotts*

on the role of leader, with Conrad Sauer as secretary, Chris Wilson as treasurer, and a committee of Vince Veevers, Inspector Bell, Frank Barnes, Dr. Kirkpatrick, Stanley Watson and Muriel Sauer. In addition, Alec Beck, manager of the Royal Oak Hotel, joined the committee as business adviser and David Pape, a local chemist, took charge of first aid equipment and medical stores.

A meeting was arranged for a week later, when instruction in first aid, rope work and knots was given. Sunday, 7 March was fixed for a practice rescue on Kern Knotts.

The first "official" call-out of the Borrowdale Mountain Rescue Team, as it was initially titled, was on 3 April 1948, when a dozen members helped police, shepherds, farmers and other volunteers (including the Penrith Beacon

Whealers Cycling Club) in a search for a walker on Cross Fell, a twenty-seven-year-old man who had been missing since 31 March.

Deep snow and strong winds hampered the searchers and it was some time later that the body was discovered by a group of boy scouts on the Alston side of the fell.

Other operations in the first year included a journey to Wastwater Screes, only to find a distressed woman walker had been rescued

by two climbers after she had spent an uncomfortable night propped up by her walking stick. One of the rescuers was Sid Cross, a well-known figure in the world of mountaineering and mountain rescue. Two further searches involved a Bradford schoolboy, later found dead near Esk Hause, and a woman missing on Great Gable, when the Team, inadvertently passing another rescue party, spent seven hours scouring the fells.

The Team was involved in nine incidents in 1948, a year of gaining experience, a year described by the secretary as “quite a successful one, serving us with new acquaintances and increasing conviviality.” Membership stood at thirty-four, at least half of whom were active. Members used their own equipment, ropes and protective clothing, such as it was. Head-torches, for example, were unheard of: hand-held Tilley lamps had to suffice.

The first annual report, like so much of the Team’s profile over the years, was low key - about 250 words on a single sheet of paper stuck in the minute book.

Although the Team was originally called “The Borrowdale Mountain Rescue Team,” its standing in the valley was low, an attitude that was bolstered by an accident on 5 June 1949.

A man fell into Lodore Falls and broke his leg. A message was sent to the Keswick Youth Hostel but it was never received. Consequently, the Team failed to arrive at the scene of the accident, an unfortunate lapse that did nothing to enhance its image in the valley.

A month later, the antipathy began to dissipate when the Team dealt with a drowning in Langstrath. There was a change of heart and the valley folk realised that the Team was taking its responsibilities seriously. However, at the fourth annual general meeting on 20 January 1951, it was unanimously agreed to change the name to “The Keswick Mountain Rescue Team.”

Arrangements in the early years were, to say the least, often haphazard and unco-ordinated. Donald Forster, who took over as secretary in February 1949, recalls a rescue on Skiddaw in April 1949.

The police asked Keswick Youth Hostel for help with a boy who had broken his leg in Millbeck Gill. Only Donald and Alan Burton, the hostel warden, were available; a handful of hostellers was rounded up and the evacuation of the casualty was completed satisfactorily.

One result of this incident was the conviction that the Team ought to have a light-weight stretcher, the first of a number of decisions to augment its meagre equipment. The local Fireworks Committee donated the proceeds from a display in Crow Park to buying the Team’s first Thomas Stretcher. A minute of a 1950 meeting records a suggestion that a

quotation be sought for a 200-foot nylon rope and a recommendation from George Fisher that some pitons be bought. Members going to France were asked to buy half-a-dozen if they were cheaper than in England.

A second Thomas Splint and blankets were ordered and gradually a basic store of essential items was assembled, kept at the Royal Oak Hotel and the Police Station. Two gross of "Mountain Rescue" shoulder flashes were bought - red letters on a stone-coloured background. Four per member were issued, with additional supplies available at 1s.6d. (7½p).

Although the Team's financial balance at the end of 1950 stood at £34.11.6, cash was still urgently needed (as it always has been) and it was decided to write to a casualty to ask whether he was prepared to meet the cost and expenses of the rescue. It was not a popular idea among members of the Team and was not continued, though twenty years later in 1979 there was a serious discussion on whether rescues should be paid for by those involved - as in other countries. The suggestion was firmly rejected.

Casualties are under no obligation to cover the costs of their rescue but many do give a donation in cash or kind. In March 1956, for example, a grateful victim bought an Ever Ready hand-lamp and reimbursed the expenditure on six gallons of petrol.

Many donors are liberal in their offerings. It cannot be stressed too strongly that the Team is a voluntary organisation, dependent on donations and the indefatigable efforts of the Team members themselves to raise funds.

It is possible to look at the history and development of the Team under the Five T's: Turn-out, Transport, Tackle, Training and Techniques.

CALL TO ACTION

Most calls for help are received by the police and the legal responsibility, at least for searching for missing persons and removing a body off the fells, still lies with them. Few officers have the skills or experience of mountain rescue: as Inspector Lilley said in 1960, "the idea of policemen undertaking this work without the assistance of experienced mountaineers is almost too ludicrous to merit consideration."

In the early days, the problem of rapid turn-out constantly nagged the Team. Only a handful of members could be reached directly by phone and call-out relied on personal contact - a slow and inefficient method of assembling a team. On occasion, members were hauled out of the Alhambra Cinema, the call to action flashed on the screen. Others, enjoying a quiet drink in their favourite hostelry, were unceremoniously winkled out to join a rescue. On one night incident, a member left his bed

and headed for the Police Station, only to find when he was halfway there that he was still wearing his slippers.

In 1951 a suggestion was made that the Team should be warned of a rescue by sounding the “Alert” signal on the disused air-raid siren. Some years later, it was common practice for the Team Land Rover to use its own siren in the town as a means of letting at least some members know that they should report to headquarters immediately.

By 1961, the target time from receiving a call for help to the dispatch of the ambulance with a minimum of six men on board was twenty-five minutes. Speed is vital (often literally life-saving) and even before modern technology was introduced, the Team managed to perform with creditable swiftness. On one occasion, a call-out to recover a woman with a broken leg on Helvellyn was accomplished in fifty-five minutes - and that included a nine mile drive to Wythburn, 600 feet of climbing, first-aid and carry down to the waiting ambulance.

In 1982, an automatic phone dialler was installed, an effective call-out mechanism for those members who had phones. Initially, trials with BT pagers in 1988 proved unsatisfactory but eventually it was decided that they should be made available to the leader and his deputies.

In 1991, the facility of Radio Pagers was extended to all members on a pruned-down list of thirty-five - a £12,000 investment from the Bates legacy which revolutionised the speed of call-out and did a great deal to boost Team morale.

Four years later, an even more sophisticated system - Alphanumeric Vodapagers - was introduced for the leader, his deputies and the medical officer. Today all active members carry this electronic bleeper, a summons at any time of night or day which ensures the Team is operative with the least possible delay.

Once the Team has responded to a call-out signal, the next essential is to reach the scene of the incident as quickly as possible . . . and that means efficient and reliable transport.

In the 1950s, this was primitive and unco-ordinated. A call-out meant that members hopped on their bikes and met at the Police Station: few in those days had cars. Once assembled, the rescuers were dispatched by a range of vehicles, from Young’s lorry or Dixon’s laundry van to the Motor Company’s pick-up or a locally owned ex-London taxi.

Des Oliver remembers dire journeys in the taxi, which had faulty gears. One member of the Team would sit on the luggage platform with a stone ready to be jammed under a wheel if the gear jumped out. The driver, usually George Fisher, would give a shout of “bale out!” and the rest of the passengers were out of the back of the taxi in seconds.

In 1954, the Team acquired a Humber Snipe shooting-brake for £145, with seating for eleven. It did sterling service, though not without problems, for several years before it was damaged. It ended its days on a farm at Grange moving hay.

After this unseemly end to the Team transport, a substitute ambulance operated until 1958 when it was in such poor condition that it was condemned as a risk to anyone riding in it. The following year, a new Land Rover was bought for £350 by a bank loan that was paid off within twelve months. It was first used on 7 March 1959: a short run to Shepherd's Crag but, for an injured climber, a rapid, safe and reasonably comfortable rescue. The Team realised that with this vehicle it would be possible to travel on difficult terrain - Langstrath or by the side of Castle Crag, for example - and get much nearer to the scene of many accidents.



Land Rover in action

By 1962, the Land Rover was showing signs of wear and it was decided to buy a secondhand vehicle of the same kind at a cost of £600. Five years later, it was modified and extended by two feet; side windows were added and accommodation provided for two stretchers.

Having two Land Rovers brought increased efficiency. The first arrivals at the Police Station were whisked off within minutes; other rescuers followed in the support vehicle. Most of the equipment was carried in the spearhead Land Rover: the second was more or less a personnel carrier which also acted as the main ambulance. There were

decided advantages in having two vehicles: flexibility, particularly in large scale searches, and the facility to cope with two simultaneous call-outs, for example.

The two Land Rovers, loaded with equipment, provided only cramped space for Team members: on return journeys, there was often a casualty to be carried as well. In 1975, through the generous efforts of Keswick Round Table, a Ford Transit Minibus was added to the Team transport. A valuable acquisition which allowed the rescuers to travel in reasonable comfort.

By 1978, the Land Rovers were showing disturbing signs of wear and tear from constant use and old age: one had been in service for twenty years and had been involved in more than 600 rescues. On 24 July 1978, an appeal was launched for £6,000 to buy a new Land Rover. Each Team member agreed to raise £100 and in months the total was reached and passed. So successful was the appeal that it was decided to raise further funds for a second replacement vehicle. One of the old Land Rovers was sold to the Wasdale Mountain Rescue Team and Keswick ordered two new Safari Land Rovers.

1985 saw yet another change. The Ford Transit Minibus, in spite of a major refurbishing in 1980, finally succumbed to the rigours of mountain rescue duties. It was decided that some £10,000 should be raised to buy a new, off-road, four-wheel drive Ford Transit personnel carrier, which could also serve as an ambulance. It was affectionately christened "The Rusty Bus" in honour of the Team's founder.

The effort needed and made to find the money to buy this vehicle is typical of the Team's apparently never-ending commitment to raising funds to improve the service it provides. Anything from raffles and collecting boxes to guessing the birthday date of a doll and proceeds from a sale at a local shop brought in contributions. Anonymous donations of up to £500 were received; an appreciative gift arrived from the parents of a former Keswick schoolboy who had been rescued from Shepherd's Crag twenty-one years previously.

With increased numbers of call-outs, the two Land Rovers suffered considerable hammering. In 1990, a new turbo-diesel Land Rover was bought, backed up by a second similar vehicle in 1991 at a cost of £16,000. Finance was available from a donation to Team funds from the estate of Mrs. Elizabeth Bates of Barnoldswick - a legacy of £50,000 in memory of her son, Eric, who had spent much time in the Keswick area but had died in the Alps.

All three vehicles are kept in tip-top condition and consistently maintained. Just as a horse rider's first responsibility is the grooming of his mount, so the Team must always ensure that its transport is ready for immediate use - and that means that the first duty on return to headquarters

after a rescue is to tidy the interior of the vehicles, check and replace equipment, and make sure that fuel tanks are full . . . a procedure that is absolutely necessary but seldom welcome at the end of a tiring rescue.

Garaging the Team vehicles has caused headaches over the years, linked, as it is, with having a base headquarters with storage facilities for equipment and areas for such essentials as training and maintenance. The location shifted from space at the Police Station to what had once been a pig sty at the Golden Lion Inn, from a garage at Bristow Hill to a garage on the Central Car Park, occupied in 1961, rebuilt as a double garage in 1967 and further extended eight years later.

By 1 March 1975, the more spacious headquarters was operational, with not only garaging but also a room which served as control base, office, rest room and limited storage space. It was no longer necessary to have the base radio at the Police Station, though a direct phone link was maintained.



Not the best of headquarters

A small exhibition was set up as a means of raising funds. Illustrating the history of mountain rescue, it gave the public information on the activities of the Team and sound advice on safety on the fells. It was a popular attraction which seems to have developed beyond its declared function into an unlicensed Citizens' Advice Bureau. One disgruntled visitor bustled in and demanded: "Just tell me how I get out of this goddam town" - presumably not out on to the hills!

The original rent for the garage was 7s.6d (37¹/₂p), in spite of a request to Keswick Town Council for rent-free accommodation. Like all charges, the figure increased over the years. An indignant correspondent to the

Keswick Reminder in 1978 announced that she was horrified that Allerdale District Council, the then owners, were charging £149 a year in rent and rates. By 1984 this figure had risen to £211 and in the next ten years zoomed fivefold to £1,039, a total which was reduced in practice by a rebate culled from another Allerdale budget.

However rapid the individual response, however quickly the Team is transported to the scene of an accident - initially by Land Rover and then on foot - no rescue could succeed without the proper tackle.

Over fifty years there has been a spectacular growth not just in the amount of equipment at the Team's disposal but also in its complexity and effectiveness.

The pioneers relied on their own ropes, their own clothing, their own torches on night rescues. Gradually, essential items were acquired: stretchers, splints, blankets, ropes. In 1956, at a cost of £23.7s.6d, Keswick Round Table presented the Team with a Davy Escape Outfit, a most useful device for crag rescues, not only of injured climbers but also of stranded sheep and foxhounds. By 1958, a second Outfit had been acquired, supplemented in 1960 by a Tragsitz, a chair-like appliance for lowering casualties down steep rock on the back of a rescuer. This was given by George Fisher after he had visited Innsbruck in Austria and brought back several items of rescue equipment.

About this time, adequate protective clothing was issued to members of the Team but they were obliged to provide their own boots. An appeal was made for cast-off boots which could be left in the vehicles as a stand-by for members who had responded to a call-out in unsuitable footwear. In 1973, comfort and protection were enhanced by the issue of polar suits, duvets . . . and boots.

The stock of equipment grew steadily: crampons, inflatable splints, abseiling gloves, two dozen crates of self-heating soup. Relatives and friends of Christopher Green, who had died on Eagle Crag, funded the purchase of binoculars.

By 1970, the stock was beginning to assume workmanlike proportions. It included several stretchers of varied designs, 1620 feet of rope, twenty-four hand torches, two first-aid sacks and twelve ice axes. A new portable generator for a flood-lamp was bought for £33.9s.0d.: it weighed eighteen pounds, ran for an hour on two thirds of a pint of fuel and produced a beam of 400 yards.

Donations in memory of two boys who died on Scafell Pike in January 1976 were used to buy a Reviva hot air apparatus at a cost of £231.10s.6d., designed and made by Peter Bell of Windermere. This allowed a patient to breathe in air which was heated by the chemical reaction between soda lime and carbon dioxide. Body temperature was raised, making the Reviva

particularly useful in cases of exposure. Its disadvantages were that it had to be carried on a pack frame and it could not operate while a stretcher party was moving.

The proposed spending of nearly £1,000 in 1980 indicates the Team's growing responsibilities and its ever-widening range of aids. Equipment for mines rescue was supplemented by life-jackets, an item of personal safety highlighted after a call-out which involved searching the flooded sides of a beck and a second incident in which the Team spent several days trying to locate two missing canoeists.

The 1983 value of the headquarters' contents assessed for insurance was £30,000: four years later it had rocketed to £57,000.

The Team continues to update and modernise its equipment, taking advantage of new drugs and new methods of treatment. In 1995, for example, an anonymous donor provided the money to buy an expensive piece of medical equipment - a "Propaq" monitoring system which registers a patient's condition, giving a read-out of temperature, blood pressure, oxygen level and heart condition.

TRAINING

However wide-ranging and comprehensive equipment, clothing and medical supplies are, they will not be effective unless Team members are properly trained in their use. One of the admirable features of the Team throughout its fifty years of activity is the willingness of the members to support a regular training programme. Experienced mountaineers though they are, they have continued to improve their skills - in techniques, in coping with unusual conditions (mine rescue, for example), in working together as a team, in casualty care (advanced mountain first-aid), in administering drugs.

Fortunately, at least one doctor has always been available as an active Team member. The original list of volunteers included no fewer than four doctors. Dr. John Lyth, climber as well as medical practitioner, was the first official Team doctor. He gave frequent lectures on first-aid, with occasional forays into more esoteric fields such as midwifery or the eight different ways of recognising death. The text of his five regular lectures was published in a pamphlet, now rare, titled *First Aid in Mountain Rescue*.

He was a convinced advocate of alcohol for exposure, exhaustion and shock. He insisted that many of the casualties had been helped by a dose of brandy but not all the Team were as wholly persuaded as Dr. Lyth was that this was an acceptable form of treatment.

In 1965, the efficiency of the Team was extended by the co-operation of a Mobile Accident Emergency Unit, organised and supervised by Mr. P. A. M. Weston, consultant surgeon of the Accident Department of the Cumberland Infirmary at Carlisle.

The Unit was on call to assist with severely injured patients and to take vital life-saving equipment, together with a doctor and other specialised medical staff, to the scene of an accident.

Equally important in the programme of training is familiarisation and practice in handling equipment - stretcher manipulation, radio procedures, rope work, coping with new types of gear. In 1994, for instance, the Team organised thirty training exercises, including a weekend on first-aid with several other local teams. A study document published in 1993 called *Rescue 2000* put training as the top priority for the future of mountain rescue.

A weekend winter training course at Glenmore Lodge in Scotland is a regular feature of the Team programme and each year ten or twelve members gain valuable experience in the snow and ice of the Cairngorms.

Speed of call-out and speed in reaching the casualty are the first steps in any rescue. Success, however, rests firmly on expertise and confidence, knowing exactly what to do in any set of circumstances - and that can only come from constant and conscientious training.

One of the most difficult and one of the most vital elements in mountain rescue is communication - guiding rescuers to a casualty, co-ordinating operations, recalling searchers, requesting additional help.

In the early days, close personal contact on a rescue often sufficed but a search, with members of the Team scattered, was more awkward to control. A Verey light fired into the sky was an indication that the victim had been found or that a search had been called off, but it was not unusual for someone to be out all night, only to find the operation had ended hours previously. Various methods of recall were tried. On one occasion, a joint exercise with other teams was held in Langdale when different kinds of weapons were fired to test their audibility as a means of warning.

By 1964 walkie-talkies were in use, with a fixed set at base, a mobile link fitted in one of the vehicles and Pye Bantam sets for individuals. Efficiency and control were much improved and the system has basically remained, continually updated and replaced by evermore sophisticated apparatus.

In 1971, Pye Westminster radios were bought with funds raised by a sponsored school walk in Borrowdale. In 1978, the cost of six Dymar hand-sets was largely met by a generous donation from the Keswick and District Licensed Victuallers Association. In 1989, a gift from the police

of a base set, three mobiles and fifteen hand-sets was supplemented by additional equipment costing some £5,000.

By 1994, radio provision was “as efficient as could be expected in the present circumstances.” It is a patent fact that however expensive or high-tech the radio network is, there will always be problems in mountainous country. The Team also uses two mobile phones which suffer similar difficulties of reception.

Looking to the future, the Team is already developing the capability of plotting the movements of searchers on headquarters’ computer screen, using Global Positioning System (GPS) technology based on satellite signals. The Team has also pioneered the use of the Internet for mountain rescue.

Many victims of mountain accidents are alive today not only through the efforts of the Team but also through the uncanny abilities of trained dogs.

Search dogs have been locating missing persons for centuries. Stories of the monks of St. Bernard in Switzerland are well known; Red Cross dogs were able to find wounded soldiers during the First World War and were employed successfully in World War Two to explore damaged buildings for any signs of life.

It was not until 1964 that Hamish McInnes organised a pilot course for British dog handlers. As leader of the Glencoe Mountain Rescue Team, he had been invited to a training session mounted by the Swiss Alpine Club and immediately he realised the potential for involving dogs in the British mountains.

The Search and Rescue Dog Association (SARDA) was formed in May 1965. Over the years, as the use of search dogs expanded, smaller groups took over under the parent body. SARDA (English Lake District) is responsible for Cumbria. A two-year training with its owner makes sure that the dog will fulfil its basic purpose: to locate the airborne scent of a human being and lead its handler to the source. Several breeds meet the required standard, with Labradors, Border Collies and German Shepherds as the most popular.

The dog’s natural ability is specially in demand to find victims trapped under debris, hidden in buildings, deep in forests, swamped by avalanches, tucked away among boulders or bracken. Searches are very often night operations or in foul weather: many a frustrated Team member must have blessed the arrival of search dogs in such conditions.

To help in training, willing volunteers, affectionately known as “Dogsbodies,” hide themselves, sometimes under snow, and wait to be

found. The search may take several hours and the Dogsbody while away the time with a book, a Walkman or even a portable TV set!

SARDA dog handlers are also members of mountain rescue teams, a combination which can mean the early involvement of dogs in a search and the consequent saving of valuable time. As with mountain rescue, an intimate knowledge of a wide spread of terrain is vital: call-outs stretch well beyond a local area and training courses provide an opportunity for familiarisation over the whole of the Lake District.

SARDA, like the Team, is financed by donations and money-raising efforts by the members themselves. Normally, the major item of expense is training: the process takes time and travelling to the Cairngorms in search of snow doesn't come cheap.

A comment in a recent report on mountain rescue in the Lake District underlines just how important the role of SARDA is to all teams. "Such is the effectiveness of the dogs and handlers in searching for and locating casualties, a Team Leader in the Lake District who did not consider using dogs, if they were available, might be considered negligent by his colleagues."

A demonstration proved how effective dogs can be. A Dogsbody was buried in snow in a twenty-five yard square and three methods of discovery were tried: probing rods (twenty-eight minutes); metal detector (nine minutes); and dog (thirty seconds). The figures tell their own story.

An actual incident illustrates the value of search dogs. On 21 January 1980, two climbers were overdue from the Scafell/Great End area. One arrived at Wasdale Head and the Keswick and Cockermouth teams were called out to search for his companion. High winds and heavy snow - eighteen inches in four hours - severely hampered their efforts.

A five hour hunt failed to find the missing climber. For the next five days all the local teams, supported by other volunteers, scoured the area. The sixth day happened to coincide with the opening session of the annual SARDA training assessment course. The organisers offered the services of seven dogs and within four hours the body was found by one of the Keswick dogs on Ill Crag, a mile from Great End. It was under two feet of snow which showed clearly the footprints of searchers who had walked unaware over the hidden body.

Occasionally handlers and their dogs are called on to assist at disasters well away from their local area. In 1986 SARDA was used internationally for the first time when dogs were employed in the El Salvador earthquake. Nearer home, three Keswick handlers were involved in rescue work at the Lockerbie air crash some years ago.

WHIRLY BIRDS

SARDA has developed into a vital and integral means of support for the Team: so has co-operation with the R.A.F.

As early as November 1949, the records show that three walkie-talkies were on loan from the R.A.F. Mountain Rescue organisation and discussions were in progress about the use of Verey lights. The R.A.F. promised the gift of blankets and a sleeping bag.

It is difficult to pinpoint exactly the first occasion when helicopters were called in to help with a rescue. By 1961, the Team was certainly discussing the possibility of a service which is now an accepted and much valued part of mountain rescue.

It must be stressed that the prime responsibility of the R.A.F. helicopter units is search and rescue operations involving air-craft, aircrew and military personnel. No guarantee can be given that a helicopter will be at the ready for civilian rescue but in practice the R.A.F. make every effort to meet such requests.

Helicopters gave a new dimension to mountain rescue: crews experienced in locating crashed aircraft have proved their worth in searches. Evacuation by air can avoid undue movement and discomfort of a patient who might otherwise have to be stretchered a long distance or over rough ground. Injured victims, often lying in inaccessible places, can be airlifted and transported quickly to valley level or hospital at Keswick, West Cumbria, Barrow, Carlisle or Newcastle - a journey that takes minutes instead of hours.

Although response to a call is normally rapid and effective, there are problems. Night flying and night rescue present obvious difficulties: weather conditions certainly influence the decision of whether or not to fly.



We have lift off

Radio communication between pilot and rescue team also tends to be unpredictable.

Helicopters and their crews are on twenty-four hours standby at several bases in the United Kingdom: Leconfield in Yorkshire, Valley in Anglesey, Prestwick, Kinloss and Boulmer near Alnwick.

The Team works mainly with R.A.F. Boulmer. The estimated time of readiness for a daytime alert is fifteen minutes and forty-five minutes for a night-time call-out. The flight from base to the scene of an accident in Lakeland can take around forty minutes.

Since 1978, Sea King helicopters with a built-in “hover” facility have been adapted for search and rescue. They are capable of carrying eighteen passengers and crew and are fully equipped for emergencies. Apart from a comprehensive medical kit, among recent aids to efficiency are Night Vision Goggles which enable the crew to spot a torch shone from more than a mile away. On one night search in January 1995, the crew located two climbers ice-bound on Raven Crag in Comb Ghyll before the helicopter reached Grange on its flight up Borrowdale.

Des Oliver remembers a dramatic helicopter rescue on Black Crag in Borrowdale. A fallen climber, semi-delirious and with head injuries, had to be hauled up the crag. A helicopter was called and the victim was transferred with the aircraft balancing on one wheel - a vivid example of the pilot's skill in handling his machine - before flying off to hospital in West Cumbria.

There is no doubt that many patients owe their recovery to rapid evacuation by air and the teamwork of the men who fly the helicopters, often on the edge of safety.

A moment's thought will convince anyone that mountain rescue is dangerous - so dangerous that insurance is essential. In the early years, there was no cover available but by the mid 1950s named members of the Team were provided with some protection until the national body, the Mountain Rescue Committee, arranged insurance for anyone taking part in a rescue operation. £1,000 was payable on death, £10 a week for an accident.

The tragic death of the leader of the Cockermouth team and one of his colleagues during a practice at Buttermere in 1968 revealed the inadequacy of the policy. The following year the Team negotiated its own coverage for £4,000 on death, with a premium of just under £300 a year - a considerable drain on financial resources. For some years, Cumbria Constabulary had insured all Team members (with certain restrictions) for a death payment of £57,000; in 1987 the Team boosted this with a further layer of compensation.

In 1997, owing to more stringent reductions in the police budget, the responsibility moved to the Lake District Search and Mountain Rescue Association, which now provides personal accident insurance for all local rescue team members.

Records show that far too many hours have been spent over the lifetime of the Team discussing insurance, an aspect of its work that should have been settled years ago. Accidents to members on call-outs have been few and minor but the spectre of a major injury always hangs over any call-out or practice.

In fifty years of rescues, certain patterns have emerged. The majority of accidents happen to walkers, not rock climbers, many of whom have failed to take simple precautions before venturing on to the fells. As the 1971 report



The Old



The New

suggested: “In the majority of cases, mountain accident victims are rule breakers, guilty of extreme carelessness and unsound techniques.” The commonest injury is a broken leg or ankle, frequently caused by a slip on wet grass, snow or

loose rock and all too often the result of inadequate footwear. Smooth-soled shoes are little more than an accident waiting to happen; even the popular vibrams are far from safe on wet and slippery surfaces.

Heart attacks, epilepsy, vertigo and appendicitis have all claimed victims, sometimes fatal. Climbers have been crag-fast, caught in avalanches and hit by falling rocks. Exposure, leading to hypothermia, is a common hazard and is no respecter of persons: on 16 April 1965, during a search in Piers Gill, two members of the Team suffered from effects of exposure.

Minor accidents call for basic first-aid and the ability to carry a stretcher. On the other hand, coping with more serious incidents requires a

high degree of mountaineering and medical competency. Evacuating a climber with multiple fractures stranded precariously on a rock face poses problems which are a world away from those encountered in helping a slightly damaged walker on a valley path.

Statistics help to put the work of the Team into perspective. In 1948, the first full year of operation, there were nine incidents involving eight fell walkers and one climber; two were searches, seven were rescues. Of the nine, five were fatal.

Ten years later, the figure remained the same but in 1969 it rocketed to forty-two. In 1985 there were sixty-two call-outs for casualties whose ages ranged from ten to seventy-six. Looked at in another way, these figures can be translated into 574 calls on members and a total of 1628 man-hours. The length of time involved varied from thirty minutes to twelve hours.

Since then, there has been a steady rise, reaching a peak of eighty-seven in 1995. Add to that figure, six animal rescues and some twenty alerts for missing walkers who turned up within a "wait and see" period, plus all the training exercises, and a picture emerges of exceptional and enthusiastic commitment and dedication. By April 1997 the total number of Team call-outs reached 1693 - currently, the Keswick Team may justly claim to be the busiest in the country.

Some call-outs are long and tiring; others are brief and brisk. In 1983, in one seven day period, some members were out on five occasions.

Slightly different but equally typical of what can happen is an incident on 1 February 1987. The Team was called out to look for a missing geologist on Skiddaw. Three teams and thirteen SARDA dogs were assembled before midnight: the body was discovered about twelve hours later.

At three o'clock, when members of the Team were on their way home, a report was received that a boy had fallen on Great End. When he was found, he, too, was dead. His companion was marooned on a buttress between Central and North East Gullies - a rescue that necessitated a 400 foot climb in the dark on ice and wet rock to reach him.

The Team arrived back in Keswick at half past ten after "a hard and harrowing twenty-two hours."

On 17 October 1993 there were three call-outs in the one day. Over Christmas and New Year there was a record number of rescues. Between 4 December and 5 January the Team were on duty eleven times to deal with injuries which ranged from a broken ankle and back injuries to recovering a woman who had thrown herself down a bank of the river Greta.

Scafell and Scafell Pike, the goal of so many walkers who want to stand

on the highest peak in England, attract large numbers of fell wanderers, with a consequent tally of accidents, major and minor. Blencathra, and particularly Sharp Edge, is another black spot that has claimed its fair share of victims.

Strong winds are a frequent hazard, at times reaching crisis point. On 9 September 1970, the Team was alerted to help a party of Army apprentices in trouble on Carrock Fell. One had a fractured collar bone; another was suffering from hypothermia.

As the Team reached the ridge of the fell, they met the full force of a wind gusting up to 100 miles an hour. One member, who was carrying a stretcher on his back, was somersaulted off his feet; other members of the Team were forced to crawl on hands and knees along the exposed ridge, dragging a stretcher behind them.

Rescues like these call for a high standard of physical fitness. The Team never knows what demands lie ahead. On 3 September 1963, for example, there were three call-outs: a walker slipped in Cat Gill, sustaining lacerations to his head and leg; a climber fell from a crag on Green Gable, injuring his back and legs; a walker on Great Gable was reported overdue. At the end of this gruelling day, Des Oliver commented: "I have been out on most night rescues and this was the first time I had ever known anyone show real fatigue."

SEARCHING QUESTIONS

Searches for missing walkers may turn out to be anything from a rapid discovery, particularly if SARDA dogs are used, to an operation which involves hundreds of volunteers and which can last for several days.

A concerned friend or distraught relative reports to the police that someone is missing. The co-ordinating Team leader is called in to collect as much information as possible and assess what action should be taken.

At times, the best policy is to wait a little: this pause not only gives time for the missing person to arrive, delayed, perhaps, by getting lost or misjudging time or distance, but also for the leader to build up a picture of the situation - details of intended route, time of setting out, where last seen, type of clothing and equipment, age, health, level of competence.

To such data he will then add the possible route deviations, the state of the weather (current and forecast), the time factor, the number of searchers likely to be needed, pressure from the victim's friends and relations.

He may decide that only a small team is necessary - if, for example, the location of the missing person is fairly certain and reasonably easy to reach. On the other hand, it may be an occasion to muster a full team and

perhaps call on the services of SARDA.

If the search is not successful, it may be advisable to organise a major operation, bringing in other mountain rescue teams and a barrage of associated facilities - an extensive radio network, a control headquarters, medical and police help, R.A.F. helicopter, a canteen capable of administering to the needs of large numbers of thirsty and hungry men and women.

On 3 January 1965, 230 volunteers combed Bowfell for an eighteen-year-old girl who had tried to descend an ice-filled gully without an axe. A four-day search in the Scafell region in July 1966 for a missing doctor occupied eighty-six search parties and 1,213 volunteers.

Sadly, many such efforts end with the discovery of a body. Others have to be called off after extensive and prolonged searching have found nothing.

One of the most arduous rescues the Team has ever experienced was on the night of 16 April 1965. A call-out from Wasdale reported a fall in Piers Gill, a long and dangerous cleft in Lingmell. Two men were climbing a route known as Pilgrim's Progress: both fell, but one was uninjured and was able to reach Wasdale Head for help.

A scratch party of climbers was assembled but after a long search in exceptionally bad weather it failed to locate the missing man. Shortly before midnight the Keswick Team was alerted and some twenty members set out. An R.A.F. team from Leeming, which was in the vicinity, was also asked to co-operate.

The exact position of the accident was in some doubt and the heavy rain hindered radio communication between the searchers, Wasdale Head and base at Keswick.

The lost climber could not be found. The weather deteriorated even further and the Team leader decided to postpone the search. The Team spent several grim hours on the side wall of the Gill waiting for daylight. Two volunteers were suffering from hypothermia and had to be taken down to Wasdale Head.

Daybreak revealed the true state of the Gill: it was a swirling mass of roaring water and swollen falls. The Team retreated to Seathwaite, letting Wasdale Head know of their failure to find the injured man.

By this time, Wasdale Head had contacted the Eskdale Mountain Rescue team. The rain had eased and the beck subsided a little as the Eskdale team headed for the Gill. They found the body lying in a pool, well below the scene of the accident. The Keswick Team could not possibly have spotted him in the dark and at the height of the rain storm.



Rusty briefs his troops

Several lessons were learnt from this incident. If the experienced team, who were familiar with the terrain, had been called out instead of relying initially on a scratch group, the search would have been in daylight and, with the Team's local knowledge and training, would have stood a much better chance of success.

The heavy rain had virtually put a stop to effective radio communication and it was obvious that the apparatus needed some form of weather-proof covering in such conditions.

The rescuers themselves suffered considerable discomfort and it was decided that personal emergency survival kits would be provided in severe weather. These individual satchels included a large polythene bag capable of protecting two men, a Tommy cooker, a metal mug, coffee, matches and energy food. The Piers Gill experience also underlined how essential severe weather clothing was.

For Jim Barber, October 1953 has lasting memories. Jim was working as a guide at Glaramara, the CHA guest house at Seatoller. The father of one of his party walked over Sty Head to Wasdale but failed to return.

A search by the Team was unsuccessful; it continued for four days with up to 200 searchers on the fell: Jim himself was out for six days and three nights. Sty Head Tarn was dragged with grappling irons but no trace of a body was found.

The incident ended on 6 February 1955 when the remains of a body were discovered unexpectedly above Taylor Gill. They were identified as

those of the walker who had gone missing sixteen months previously.

A similar incident is recorded for 17 August 1983 when a twenty-one-year-old French girl was reported missing since 31 July. A thorough search proved abortive: her remains were found on Wastwater screes nearly two years later.

One of the longest searches, which had to be abandoned without success, was in 1980 when a nine-day operation failed to find a missing walker. On the other hand, a call-out on 2 March 1995 ended happily: a local farmer in a depressed state was said to be wandering in Skiddaw Forest. Several teams and SARDA dogs were unable to find him. Next day he was discovered fit and well, fast asleep under the hay in a barn at his farm.

Avalanches pose special problems. The gullies of Great End are notorious for this particular hazard. Here, on 5 February 1961, ten climbers were swept down Central Gully in a snow avalanche which left two buried and three injured, but miraculously there were no deaths. A year later, on 25 March 1962, three climbers suffered a similar misfortune in the same place. One was killed; a second was concussed; and the third sustained multiple injuries. To add to the risks of recovery, several Team members had given blood that morning and were not bursting with energy.

The most critically injured survivor was stretchered down to Seathwaite; to save time in the severe weather, the second casualty was taken down pickaback; the body was evacuated on the stretcher from the Sty Head first-aid box.

An incident on 1 September 1966 was complicated by a different freak of nature. A young girl, inadequately clothed, was suffering from exhaustion at Stake Pass in Langstrath. It appeared to be a fairly routine rescue at low level but the Team discovered the Borrowdale valley was flooded. What should have been a straightforward, comparatively simple task was transformed into a rescue of considerable difficulty.

A problem of a different kind faced the Team on 29 July 1987. A German walker fell sixty feet off Sharp Edge and suffered abrasions, a lacerated scalp and leg and arm injuries - obviously a stretcher case. It turned out to be an exhausting carry: the victim weighed eighteen stones!

A similar dilemma confronted the Team on 1 November 1993 when a nineteen-stone man injured his ankle in Langstrath and was "carried to Stonethwaite with difficulty." He more than filled the narrow stretcher which actually bent under his weight.

Some rescues call for a little ingenuity. On 31 October 1995, a fourteen-year-old girl slipped on Shepherd's Crag and jammed her knee firmly between two rocks. It refused to budge until the Team applied a liberal

dose of Fairy Liquid soap to help to free the trapped limb.

That was a true accident, unexpected and unscheduled. But far too many incidents are the result of walkers setting off for the hills unsuitably clothed, poorly equipped and dangerously shod. The 1970 Team report comments: "It is not uncommon to see a plastic-mac clad father and small son dressed in city clothes and slip-on shoes or even open-fronted sandals with their afternoon tea in a carrier-bag advertising some supermarket or other, negotiating difficult snow patches on the corridor route to Scafell Pike."

In 1963, for example, the victims of four accidents in three months were all wearing shoes. On 11 August 1969, a nineteen-year-old girl twisted her ankle at Hollows Lane, Grange: she was wearing beach shoes. On 29 October 1970, a fifty-eight-year-old woman on Cat Bells was admiring the view when she tripped over her dog's lead: she was wearing wellingtons.

On 27 August 1974, an eleven-year-old boy fell to his death on Blease Fell: he was wearing sandals. So was the woman rescued on Scafell in difficult terrain and very bad weather. When her attention was drawn to her wholly unsuitable footwear, she replied: "Don't worry about my sandals, love; they aren't my best pair."

A particularly nasty accident on Shepherd's Crag on 10 April 1970 illustrates the need for proper equipment. Four young climbers fell: one died from severe head injuries; the others suffered injuries of varying severity, including a fractured pelvis, a broken arm and shock. None of the four was protected by a helmet; they were climbing on one rope and were relying on unsafe belays - a certain recipe for disaster.

On 25 October 1990, three crag-fast climbers were helped off Gillercomb Buttress: they had been following the wrong page of the guidebook. A man and a woman walking from Elterwater to Buttermere on 29 December 1973 were found in Wasdale: they were relying on a postcard map.

On 8 February 1993, a couple were seen heading for Scafell Pike, the girl clad in a mini-skirt and fashion boots. When they were located late at night in Taylor Gill, it was discovered they were following a line drawing on a map.

School and other groups all too often feature in the Team records. Untrained leaders, too few leaders for the size of the party, lack of proper equipment (the personal survival kit of one school group consisted of a packed lunch and a cold drink), failure to keep the group together, attempting challenges beyond the competence or physical ability of the party, no training in first-aid, failing to realise that what is a pleasant route

in summer may be a near Alpine experience in winter: all these and more disturbing omissions may lead to serious accidents.

The stupidities are matched by the oddities. On 12 October 1957, a man collapsed near Taylor Gill. He had walked from Wasdale Head where he had over indulged in alcohol. A mug of hot tea was sufficient to bring this incident to a happy conclusion and the victim was able to continue his walk to safety.

On 29 January 1962, a patient from Blencathra Sanatorium was reported missing. After an all night search, he was discovered hiding behind some rocks not very far from the hospital. He had seen the torches of the rescuers but thought they were the lights of aeroplanes flying up the valley.

Some rescues have an even more bizarre aspect: the man on Castle Crag suffering acute mania; the suicide in Yewthwaite mine; the man who slipped while opening a gate on the Sty Head path and broke his leg; the body uncovered when the level of Thirlmere fell during a drought; the hang gliders who collided in mid air; the dog chased by a cow who deposited his owner in the river with a broken ankle; the injured photographer who was able to guide the Team by using his flash gun; the man on Great End who set fire to his map to pinpoint his location; the man lost at two o'clock in the morning while delivering turkeys in the Duddon valley.

On one call-out, an exhausted retired minister collapsed and had to be stretchered off the fell - but not before he had insisted that the rescuers should bow their heads while he offered up a prayer.

At times, the Team has been called to deal with emergencies outside its normal field of operation. These range from rescuing sheep and hounds to assisting the police at the scene of a road accident; from floods at Seathwaite to heath fires on King's How; from rescuing campers stranded on an island in the middle of a raging river at Stonethwaite to helping in a search over the Irish Sea for some boys drifting on a lilo; from coping with the aftermath of a collision between two jet fighters over Walla Crag on 17 June 1987 to helping foolish motorists on an ice-bound Honister Pass when Team members were forced to wear crampons on the road itself.

In February 1996, West Cumbria experienced a period of severe weather. The ambulance service found road conditions atrocious and the four-wheel drive vehicles of the Cockermouth Mountain Rescue Team were drafted into service. The Keswick Team spent five days and nights providing continuous support for their Cockermouth colleagues.

DON'T GO DOWN THE MINE

Most people, thinking of a mountain rescue team, will naturally assume that its field of responsibility is the fells and crags. But the area in which the Keswick Team operates has more than its fair share of old mine workings - shafts, adits, tunnels and levels which may be several hundred years old.

The dangers underground, particularly for the inexperienced explorer or the curious visitor who wanders into an inviting hole in the fellside, are numerous: getting lost, rotting timbers, falling roofs, precipitous drops, water, confined channels, insecure shoring.

One of the most dangerous rescues the Team has ever tackled occurred at Force Crag Mine on 10 August 1972. Two men were exploring the disused workings when one of them fell as the rotten timbers of an old shaft gave way.

His companion raised the alarm and several Team members went into the tunnel. After about thirty yards, they came to a roof fall and were forced to crawl through a narrow hole in the heap of debris. A little further on, they reached a gap in the floor through which the man had fallen. Luckily, he had landed on a ledge with a drop to the next level at his feet. He had a broken arm and ribs and sundry cuts and bruises.

Overhead there was an unstable hopper filled with several tons of rocks and boulders - a potential danger likely to cause considerable damage if it were dislodged.

A stout plank was brought to bridge the shaft. A Team member was lowered sixty feet to give first-aid to the injured man and tie him to a rope. Using what can only be called tug-of-war techniques, he was dragged to the surface.

One result of this experience was the construction of a hoisting apparatus to replace the fifteen-foot long, heavy, unwieldy builder's plank. High Duty Alloys of Distington designed and made a frame, rather like a ridge tent in shape. It was very strong, light in weight, easy to transport and erect; it was adaptable and did not require conventional anchoring.

Mine rescue needs other specialised equipment. Stretchers, for example, are of two kinds. The "coffin lid" is rigid, with sledge runners and end-handles and is specially useful if the casualty has suspected spinal damage. The "Neil Robertson" is strapped round the victim, immobilising the whole of his body except head and feet, and allowing greater flexibility for the handlers.

A wire cable hoist is available for hauling casualties to the surface, though a group of willing hands at the end of a rope is often the most effective method of extraction.

One thing is certain: whatever means are used, mine rescue is exhausting, dangerous and seldom easy.

Take the rescue at Dry Gill Mine on High Pike in the Caldbeck fells on 31 August 1979. The casualty was trapped in a shaft deep below ground: rotting timbers, rungless ladders, false floors and unsupported roofs added to the difficulties and hazards of the rescuers.



The Team in the 1960s

There was room for only two people. They had to lie head-first at an angle of 60° and it took three hours for them to dig their way through debris to reach the injured man. Another four hours of tricky, exhausting manoeuvring were needed before he was brought to the surface and airlifted to hospital.

This major operation involved three Mountain Rescue teams, the Fire Service, the police, an ambulance unit and the WVS. One spin-off was the formation of the Lakes Mines Rescue Unit, now the Cumbria Ore Mines Rescue Unit (COMRU), comprising six members from each of three Mountain Rescue teams who are available to cope with the demands of this particular kind of rescue and its special problems.

Animals as well as human beings can get into trouble on the fells and over the years the Team has been called to rescue many a crag-fast sheep or stranded foxhound.

On 9 November 1958, a group of eight searched Eel Crag in the Newlands valley for two hounds of the Melbreak pack. The call came late in the afternoon and it was felt that two dogs did not merit risking the lives of the rescuers.

It was decided to wait until early the next day but the huntsman said the hounds were his best pair and were very valuable. The Team agreed to turn out and, with the aid of a powerful light, scoured the crags.

It soon became obvious that further search would not only be unlikely to find the missing animals: it would also be very dangerous for the Team, working among gullies and ledges and loose stones.

The rescuers limped back to Keswick in the clapped-out ambulance, its damaged horn refusing to stop its blaring scream. Next day, private cars took the searchers back to Eel Crag.

The huntsman pointed out the spot where one hound had last been seen and it was decided to concentrate on this location, which turned out to be a very awkward place to reach - impossible to get there directly from above, impossible to negotiate an overhang from below. It was decided to climb to the top of the crag, descend a gully and traverse about 120 feet across the rock face.

It was a delicate manoeuvre on loose stones. After a series of abseils, the rescuers discovered the hound. It was tied into a cradle made from a sack and lowered over the overhang to the huntsman below.

As darkness fell, the Team then had to climb back up the crag, thankful for the fixed ropes that had been put in position. A donation of £10 from the Hunt helped to swell the funds for a much needed new ambulance (with a controllable horn!).

This difficult rescue taught the Team at least two lessons: to have as much equipment as possible ready for use ("you can never have too much") and to make preparations for working in the dark ("fifteen minutes spent planning might save hours").

Hoax calls and false alarms are rare. Often they turn out to have been made with good intent - a boulder mistaken for a body, strange cries, puzzling lights, fireworks - but the odd malicious or mischievous call can cause a great deal of fruitless effort. On 25 August 1982, for example, a report was received of a man with a broken leg in the Scafell area. Six rescue teams and an R.A.F. helicopter failed to find the slightest trace of any casualty and some 300 man-hours were wasted.

Equally frustrating and irritating are the call-outs for missing walkers

who have failed to report that they are safely off the hill, perhaps in the wrong valley, perhaps already back home, perhaps enjoying a drink in some local hostelry. While they relax in the comfort of warmth and shelter, the Team may be out in foul weather, facing the potential risks of any rescue and searching vainly for a non-existent casualty.

On 22 July 1958, eight members set off an hour or so before midnight to look for two missing walkers in Bull Gill who turned up half an hour later but no one informed the searchers on the fell. Unaware of what had happened, they continued their now futile search until half past three in the morning.

There are also those walkers and climbers who confidently declare “it can’t happen to me.” Perhaps a warning in the 1974 report should be freely available to all who set foot on fell or crag: “It cannot be said often enough or clearly enough that anyone who goes on a mountain, for whatever purpose, however well prepared, is at risk.”

Running an efficient Mountain Rescue Team costs a great deal of money. Apart from capital expenditure on such major items as Land Rovers, radios and a wide range of equipment, there are the on-going expenses of medical and other expendable stores, fuel, clothing and repairs. Some idea of how costs have soared is glaringly evident from two



An artist's impression of the new headquarters

statistics: in 1956 the cost of running the Team was £185.15s.8d. (“which is a large sum to raise each year”); in 1995 the total assets, including funds for the new base, reached nearly £303,500.

Various methods of raising money have kept the Team solvent. A group of generous donors ensures a steady income. In 1957, 100 patrons, with Lord Rochdale as Chief Patron, contributed £92.13s.6d.; by 1976, seventy-three patrons donated £264; in 1995 the total had risen to £2,446.

Donations from widely differing sources swell the bank balance: victims and their families, schools, clubs, local authorities, individuals - all contribute what they can afford or what they consider appropriate. Occasionally, a substantial windfall boosts funds and provides the money to buy expensive items which otherwise would not be available. An outstanding gift of £50,000 from the estate of Mrs. Elizabeth Bates of Barnoldswick in 1991 enabled the Team to buy, among other items, a new Land Rover and a network of radio pagers.

The key fund-raisers, however, are the members themselves. It is to their infinite credit that, in addition to their main function of rescuing people in trouble on the fells, they are equally committed to keeping the financial state of the Team in good order.

Money has accrued from coffee mornings and sweepstakes, dances and exhibitions. In 1953, a display in the Albion Hall of equipment used on John Hunt's successful Everest expedition raised £50. Special expenditure means special appeals; targets, as often as not, have been reached and passed.

One of the basic sources of income is the collecting box: not so much the tin held out to crowds of shoppers on Saturday mornings but rather the boxes which sit permanently in businesses and banks, cafes and caravan sites, clubs and pubs, hotels and guest houses.

The scheme has been in operation for practically the whole of the Team's existence. In 1947 a collecting box was put in the Scafell Hotel at Rosthwaite. At a meeting on 15 July 1948, Mr. Alec Beck, manager of Keswick's Royal Oak Hotel and a keen supporter of the Team, commended this method of raising funds.

By March 1951, the committee was discussing the design of a more decorative type of label for the boxes. The statement of accounts for 1951 shows that six boxes were in position - four hotels in Borrowdale, Seathwaite Farm and the Royal Oak Hotel. They produced a total of £24.8s.9d.

Five years later, the income from this source had fallen to £17.14s.1d. A decision was made in 1964 to extend the scheme and by 1967 sixty boxes were distributed. In 1984, the boxes were bringing in £2,235, a figure which rose to £11,466 in 1995 from 190 boxes. It is an impressive figure - but think how long it must take Brian Martland, the current co-ordinator, to visit nearly 200 premises to empty the boxes and keep

them in good condition.

Without doubt the finest example of fund raising is the saga of the new headquarters which began in 1992 when the report for the year admitted that “we feel that we must now seriously consider a move into larger premises.” It was a decision that had been simmering for some years.

The cramped garage, home of the Team for so long, had no adequate control room, no drying room, a training area only twelve feet square and very limited storage space. As Mick Guy, the Team chairman, said, “At present the Team is running a highly professional operation from what is effectively a set of four near derelict domestic garages.”

So began the long quest for a suitable site (“the most arduous mountain the Team has ever had to climb”) and a capital sum of £200,000. Thirty-four sites were considered but other factors also contributed to the delay: persuading the public that a new base was essential, considering the possibility of buying a site, getting planning permission, and, from the outset, the strict regulations that governed any building in so sensitive an area. After many months, all parties concerned settled on a suitable site in the corner of the Lakeside Car Park, a location giving immediate road access and conveniently positioned for the Borrowdale valley, the main target of the Team’s activities.

Allerdale District Council generously agreed to sacrifice a number of parking spaces to accommodate the new building. The Lake District Special Planning Board eventually gave the necessary planning permission on 1 November 1994 and Sir Chris Bonington cut the first sod in January 1996.

The appeal, with Sir Chris as chief patron, was launched on 3 June 1995 at a weekend of events which included lectures by Sir Chris and Des Oliver. It raised an encouraging £2,000, the prelude to the next eighteen months when money poured in from well-wishers of all kinds.

Large donations arrived from, among others, Mrs. Ada Hillard of Ambleside, the Lake District Search and Mountain Rescue Association (£20,000) and the Chris Brasher Trust (£10,000). Twelve-year-old Rebecca Hodgson, daughter of the Team leader, swam the length of Derwentwater and raised £1,200; Keswick Rotary Club handed over a cheque for £1,222; Trinity School donated £175, the Midland Bank £1,500. Two walkers tramped the Highland Way and raised £500; the wives of three Team members and a friend walked the Coast to Coast in early March 1995 and raised £700. Sponsored cyclists rode from Coast to Coast and from Land’s End to John o’Groats, orienteers ran from Thirlmere to Patterdale.

These and many other efforts brought the target figure of £200,000

nearer. The Team was bitterly disappointed when a bid for £40,000 was rejected by the National Lottery Fund on the grounds that mountain rescue was not a sport and was “of insufficient community benefit.”

Undeterred, the Team pressed on with its own efforts to reach the planned target. A support group, formed specifically to help with fund raising for the new premises, sold sweat shirts and other merchandise, manned stalls at local shows, arranged barn dances and rattled collecting tins in the town centre.

The final achievement was well over £200,000: the new headquarters could start life solvent. Opening day, with Sir Chris and Mrs Hillard performing the ceremony, was 26 October 1996, one of the most memorable days in the history of the Team. Two open days allowed hundreds of people, many of them old members and friends, to wonder at this purpose-built, well equipped base, so different from the previous cramped and crowded premises.

Appropriately designed, it fits sympathetically into its surroundings and makes full use of local stone. Its facilities must be the envy of mountain rescue teams throughout the country: a large meeting room, a spacious garage and workshop (equivalent in size to the whole of the old base), a high-tech control centre, adequate locker and drying space, a rope training area, an office and kitchen - and even a quiet room where relatives and friends of casualties can wait.

In April 1997, the building was awarded a “Special Mention” (one of thirty-eight throughout the country) by the Civic Trust in its annual Awards Scheme. The citation reads: “Partially built into higher ground at the rear, the building sits well in its site and the use of local stone and slate gives it the impression of having been there for some time.”

One of the strengths of the Team is its firm tradition of continuity. In its fifty years, apart from its founder, Rusty Westmorland, it has had only three leaders, four medical officers and one firm of auditors.

In many ways, the key figure in the Team is the leader. In the early days, several members were labelled “leader.” There were eight in 1951 but it became obvious that the Team would perform more effectively with a single leader and, if necessary, deputies.

George Fisher filled the post until 1981 - thirty-five years and over 800 call-outs which had seen fundamental and far-reaching changes in so many aspects of the Team’s work.

Born at the now demolished Nag’s Head Inn at Wythburn, George walked the fells and climbed the crags with his brother, Richard, as his companion and only a cart rope for protection. During the Second World War, he spent four years with the Rifle Brigade before returning to civilian

life and a three year stint as an instructor at the Ullswater Outward Bound School.

In 1957, he set up his own business selling specialist mountaineering equipment, a modest venture which expanded into one of the most enterprising of its kind in the country. He qualified as a Mountain Guide early in his career, when such qualifications were rare. He was a founder member of the Keswick Mountaineering Club and the Lake District Search Panel.

Although no longer active, as President since 1985 George maintains a fatherly interest in the Team he helped to create. His years of experience and specialised knowledge have played a key role in the success of the Team throughout its half century.

George's deputy, Mike Nixon, took over the leadership in 1981, thirty years after he joined the Team in 1952. Mike was born in Malaya and educated at St. Bees. Like many another devotee of the fells, he went into forestry, before joining the staff of George Fisher's shop. He has served as Team Quartermaster and Transport Officer (an appropriate responsibility for a vintage car enthusiast), with active involvement his first priority. By 1992, the Team had dealt with some 1,300 incidents: Mike had been on over 1,000 of them.

He will never forget his first rescue. Just before midnight on Christmas Day 1952, there was a call-out for two climbers, both in their early twenties, missing on Great End.

It was freezing hard and several inches of snow added to the hazards facing the Team. At the foot of Central Gully, two frozen bodies were found at half past one. An unattached rope lay beside them and it was assumed that they must have tried to rope down the frozen ice-filled gully.



George, Rusty and the Duke

One of the men was wearing smooth-soled shoes.

The incident occurred in the days when there were no Team radios or vehicles. Two members returned to Seathwaite to phone for extra help and police support. The local inspector went to the scene wearing wellingtons and full police uniform: small wonder that he was heard to declare “never again”!

At first light, the remaining rescuers brought the bodies down and loaded them on to the back of an open truck, covered with a tarpaulin. They arrived back in Keswick to be met by the crowds which had assembled in the Market Square to see the start of the traditional Boxing Day hunt. Des Oliver, who was with Mike on his first rescue, too, described it as “a bit brutal, to say the least.”

The present leader, who succeeded Mike in 1993, is Mark Hodgson, a member of a well-known Keswick family and a Team member since 1976. He has three deputies: Roy Henderson, Simon Hodgson and Chris Higgins.

Both George Fisher (1983) and Mike Nixon (1993) have been awarded the M.B.E. for services to Mountain Rescue, joining Colonel Westmorland who was awarded the O.B.E. in 1964, the year that the Team was honoured by a Certificate of Merit for animal rescue from the RSPCA.

In July 1958 the Mountain Rescue Committee presented the Team and its organiser, Rusty Westmorland, with a “Testimony of Appreciation on behalf of all British Mountaineers in grateful acknowledgement of outstanding service in the succour of the injured.” Thirty years later, in 1987, the same Committee awarded Distinguished Service Certificates to George and Richard Fisher. Along with Mike Nixon and Rusty, both George and Richard are included in the twenty-one names on the Distinguished Service List (1996) of the Lake District Search and Mountain Rescue Association.

The Team has been exceptionally fortunate in its medical officers. The pattern of active participation and constant training was set by Dr. Lyth, founder member of the Team and its medical officer until 1963.

Dr. John, as he was widely known, joined many a rescue and even when he was no longer able to go on the fell he would wait at advanced base in case his skills were required when a casualty was brought down. His loyalty lasted until the end: only hours before he died, he went to Lairthwaite School to give a first-aid demonstration to four young members of the Team.

He was in general practice in York from 1912 to 1946 but his talents were not confined to medicine and mountains. Widely read and a keen student of the classics, he had considerable literary ability, best in evidence in his book of poems, *One More Cairn*, published in 1954.

Anyone at home on the crags will surely echo the sentiments of:

“I have loved rock and all the things that go
With climbing; I have loved the feel of rope
To handle it alone, without the hope
Of present use; the smooth, soft, even flow
Of well-used nylon; or the rougher touch
Betrayed by hemp, so it be stout and strong.”



An early carry - Dr. John on right

Dr. John's services to the community and mountain rescue in particular were acknowledged by a memorial seat at Rosthwaite, just at the start of the popular footpath to Watendlath.

Dr. John was more or less retired but his successors have been busy general practitioners in Keswick. Dr. Joe Mitchell took over in 1963 and served as Team medical officer until 1988. In 1972 he was joined by Dr. Mike Turnbull and for sixteen years the Team had the services of two official doctors. Dr. Turnbull retired from the post in 1992 when Dr. Peter White took on the duties of Team doctor.

The Team looks forward to the next fifty years, confident in its well-tried skills and aware that the demand for its services is likely to increase. In the mid 1990s, the annual call-out figure is approaching 100; by 2047, when the Team celebrates its centenary, who can guess what it will be? Perhaps by then the whole ethos of mountain rescue will have changed.

During the last fifty years, one message has been trumpeted loud and clear: the forty or so men and four women members of the Team, drawn from all walks of life, are unpaid volunteers, a status they jealously guard.

Annual running costs top £30,000. The Team's area of operation covers some 400 square kilometres and includes three of the highest mountains in England and one third of the tops listed in Wainwright's pictorial guides to the Lake District. Accidents can occur anywhere in this widely varied landscape: on the crags of Borrowdale or the rocky summit of Great Gable, the ridges of Blencathra or the remote wilderness of Back o' Skiddaw, the tourist-thronged shores of Derwentwater or the woods of Whinlatter, the snow gullies of Great End or the soggy wasteland of Ullscarf.

Some cynics suggest that the Team members enjoy their self-imposed duties, that mountain rescue is a convenient outlet for a macho image. It is true that all of them revel in being on the fells and crags - they wouldn't be in mountain rescue if they didn't - but to imagine there is pleasure in turning out on a cold, wet winter's night to deal with a casualty shows a singular lack of judgement.

As Rusty Westmorland commented back in 1958: "No one who has not experienced working on a crag face in darkness, rain, sleet or snow to get an injured man off can imagine just how tough it can be."

There is, of course, the satisfaction of a job well done, a life saved; there is the appeal of companionship, of working together as a trained unit; there is the "there but for the grace of God go I" feeling, coupled with a sincere desire to help those in need.

Perhaps the best compliment we can pay to this group of dedicated rescuers is to try to make sure that we shall never need their services.

THE STORY CONTINUES - The years 1997 - 2005

The fiftieth year of operations saw the Team firmly established in its new headquarters, fine tuning and customising its welcome space to fit in with its expanding operational and training requirements. The control room was fitted out with the latest in computer and radio technology together with extra phone lines and mapping aids. The rope training area came in for special attention, developing the facility for indoor practice in stretcher lowering and complex rope techniques, together with improvements to the kitchen and drying areas.

Team members went to Glenmore Lodge for valuable winter training and driving skills were enhanced by a four-wheel driving course on the Greystoke estate.

As well as the sixty-seven incidents and eight animal rescues attended,



Glencoe Training 2006

with the usual variety of leg injuries, missing persons, slips on wet rock and grass and overdue walkers, the Team re-enacted the first practice held on 7th March 1948 at Kern Knotts on Great Gable. It came as no surprise that the stretcher lower had to be abandoned part way through to free members to attend a call-out on Brund Fell! Such are the demands on a busy rescue team.

By the New Year it was becoming increasingly obvious that the useful life of the four-wheel drive Ford Transit was limited and it was decided to replace it with a similar but more sophisticated model. Much discussion went into its modification to balance its use for equipment, personnel and casualty transport. One beneficiary of this new purchase was the gift of the old vehicle to Dartmoor Rescue Team who, hopefully, will continue its involvement in rescue work for a few more years.

New equipment included the availability of several G.P.S. (Global Positioning Systems), units, especially essential on night searches, the repair of the old Sty Head stretcher box was completed. Since the 1930's, this first aid equipment has been available for climbers and hill walkers and was badly in need of repair and refurbishment. After restoration by a skilled joiner in the team, it was replaced in its original position courtesy of the R.A.F. helicopter.

Sadly, January 1999 saw the passing of George Fisher M.B.E. who, for over 30 years, was the influential Leader, and after his active involvement

on call outs, President of the Team. He, along with his brother Richard, had been a member from the start and their contribution to mountain rescue acknowledged by the award of the Distinguished Service Certificate from the Mountain Rescue Committee, as was ex-Team Leader and now President, Mike Nixon, who has also been the recipient of this prestigious award.

It is a testimony to their dedication and long service that, apart from Col. Westmorland, the Team has only had three leaders in nearly 60 years. Many of the present members have been actively involved for more than 20 years, and their commitment, dedication, enthusiasm and team spirit is reflected in the efficiency and professionalism commented on by those who have to call on their services.

Regular winter training in Scotland, together with the purchase of several avalanche transceivers, proved their worth in January when the team was called out to Central Gully on Great End, when 15 climbers were reported to be caught in a major avalanche. Fortunately, only five climbers were involved with just one serious casualty, the remainder having had a lucky escape. Sharp Edge on Blencathra too, claims its regular share of serious incidents with no less than five major call outs during the year and is now the major accident black spot in the Team's area. These often involve the use of the R.A.F. helicopter for the evacuation of the seriously injured casualty and the Team's admiration and appreciation of the skill and courage of the pilots and crew who fly in the most demanding conditions is fully deserved.

A recent innovation has been the purchase of a rigid inflatable boat, together with a number of dry suits, for use in white water and lake rescues, an increasing and vital aspect of the Team's work. Several members have attended courses to qualify in this more specialised skill, as well as spending a day with the Workington lifeboat crew, giving an insight on "how the other half lives."



Great North Air Ambulance

The new millennium brought another busy year for the Team with 75 rescues, including 6 in the one day (4th September), with their usual mix of leg injuries, searches, medical and hypothermic cases, but several stand out in the memory of those involved. In May, three climbers, one with an arm injury, stuck on Black Crag in Borrowdale, were evacuated from the steep face using a technique known as “one-man rescue,” abseiling down the crag and attaching the casualty to the rescuers own harness. A spectacular, quick, but safe, well rehearsed procedure. The biggest mountain rescue search for many years took place in September over several days, with over 150 rescuers from 11 teams, 17 search dogs and a helicopter searching for a missing walker. Unfortunately, despite the massive effort, no one was found, and the incident only resolved by a sad, accidental find, several months later. A more unusual rescue took place in November, involving a lorry carrying explosives that had crashed in icy conditions ending upside down in Honistor Ghyll. Rescuers spent several hours providing safe access for the evacuation of the dangerous cargo. Some of the worst weather conditions the Team has ever encountered were met with on a rescue on New Years Eve. Two walkers had “gone to ground” “on the summit of Skiddaw having succumbed to the deteriorating weather. Gale force winds and driving snow made progress on the summit plateau almost impossible, and rescuers had to literally hold on to each other to avoid being blown off their feet. At times, crawling on hands and knees was the only way to make progress. On reaching the casualties, the strength of the wind was such that it was impossible to return and the only means of safe descent was to continue downwind. Some members had to return next day in better conditions to retrieve abandoned equipment.

These four incidents illustrate the wide variety of skills, training and equipment needed in rescue work, but as Team Leader Mark Hodgson says, “each rescue is just as important as any other to which we are called. Each casualty rescued has usually suffered the trauma of injury, or the distress of being lost, often in poor weather. The need to reassure, treat and evacuate a casualty, no matter the seriousness of their injuries or the technical difficulty involved with the rescue is paramount.” A philosophy the Team has maintained since its beginnings.

The following year, “Foot and Mouth” devastated the area, not only affecting farmers and businesses, but also curtailing all activities on the hills. Up to the end of February, the Team had 13 callouts, then only a further 5 to the end of July. Outdoor practices were limited and training officers devised an imaginative variety of exercises using the rope training area and first aid activities. With the lifting of restrictions, “normal service” was resumed, so that by the end of the year the Team had dealt with its 2000th incident.

A frequent sight on the hills is the walker using a mobile phone to tell someone at the office or back at home, about the wonderful view they can see and the marvellous time they are having. It is also extremely useful in case of an accident, when the emergency services can be alerted, accurate information passed and much time saved in calling out the Team. Unfortunately, it is an increasing trend among a minority of people to use it to call for assistance for the most trivial of reasons, an injured finger, feeling hungry, a broken bootlace, not quite sure where they are and its getting late. Most Rescue Teams could easily add to the list from their own experiences. Despite their valuable use in an emergency, mobile phones are not the most reliable of instruments, batteries run down, and reception is poor or even non-existent in mountain areas. They are certainly no substitute for basic mountain skills and good common sense and contributed to making 2002 the third busiest year in the Team's history.



Canada Training

The following April presented the Team with another first! A huge fire on Barrow and Outerside, fanned by strong easterly winds, threatened to devastate the area, and Team members spent 3 days assisting the Fire Service and National Trust and Park Rangers in bringing it under control.

Whilst helping, the Team was called out twice to attend rescues on Glaramara and Scafell Pike. Other, more memorable incidents during the year, were the rescue of 14 youngsters and their leaders from Bakestall in difficult weather conditions, the recovery of 3 hounds stuck on Miner's Crag requiring the descent of a 600ft rope in severe icy conditions, two searches for local people missing in the area, both, fortunately, with happy outcomes, and several demanding crag rescues using the "one-man rope" technique.

Though not the busiest in terms of the number of rescues attended (64), 2004 heralded several important milestones in the life of the Team. The Great North Air Ambulance commenced operations in Cumbria and though not a substitute for the capabilities and expertise of the RAF Sea King, with its night flying and winching capabilities, it became another valuable resource in casualty evacuation. A day's familiarisation visit to rescue base by the doctors and paramedics of the new service and several combined practices have helped cement trust and

understanding and establish new protocols for its use.

With the generous legacy of a local lady, it has been possible to purchase two new Land Rover ambulances to replace the present ageing vehicles. This had the added benefit of being able to help two other teams in a less fortunate financial position. Welcome recipients of the old vehicles were Kintail Mountain Rescue Team in Scotland and Edale Rescue and Search Team from Derbyshire, who were then able to pass on their replaced transport to the North of Tyne Search and Rescue Team. Altogether four grateful rescue teams and countless casualties benefited from this much appreciated generosity.

Two team members were sponsored to attend a training course in British Columbia in Advanced Rigging for Rescue with the world-renowned expert, Kurt Mauthner. The valuable knowledge gained has not only benefited the Keswick Team, but been passed on to several other teams through invitations to special practices and weekend courses. Again, another example of cooperation and goodwill made possible by the generosity of public donations.

2005, the busiest year to date in Team history, with 88 call-outs and 36 alerts, incidents that do not necessitate a full mobilisation of the Team, started off with another first. The January floods “tested the resources of the Team in a new direction which we passed with flying colours” to quote Team Leader, Mark Hodgson. Assistance was given to the Police and Fire Service, using the boat and 4x4 vehicles for evacuating people and pets from the stricken areas of the town. 10 Team members were themselves directly affected by the severe flooding and gale force winds, yet continued to help the evacuation of others in the town.

This incident resulted, later in the year, in an invitation to Mark and Paul Horder, the Mountain Rescue Committee representative on the IKAR, the International Kommission for Alpine Rescue, to attend a reception, in February 2006, at Buckingham Palace hosted by the Queen and several members of the Royal Family to honour the work of the Emergency Services and Disaster Relief personnel. Also invited were representatives of the Fire Service, Police, Bomb Disposal, Sea King Helicopters and the mini-submarine involved in the rescue of the crew of the Russian submarine trapped in late 2005. As Mark and Paul said later, “a great honour and pat on the back for the Team, but a surreal experience to see the Team’s Land Rover parked in front of Buckingham Palace.”

Other call-outs stay in the mind. Difficult rescues of seriously injured casualties on Sharp Edge, Shepherd’s Crag and Gowder Crag, technical crag rescues on Great End and Black Crag, long night searches on Scafell, Great Gable, Skiddaw and Helvellyn, quick dashes to treat and evacuate countless leg injuries and medical emergencies, frustrating investigations



At Buckingham Palace

of odd mobile phone messages, assistance given to young people and families getting into difficulties. In other words, a typical year in the life of a mountain rescue team, always anticipating the ordinary and usual, but prepared and ready for the extraordinary and unusual, and dealing with each incident with professionalism, expertise, care and compassion.



Brian Martland