

Aberdyfi Search and Rescue Team

Annual Report 2019-20

This Report covers the period April 2019 to March 2020.

Mountain Rescue England and Wales (MREW) converted from being an Unincorporated Charity to being a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) on 31st December 2019. Aberdyfi Search and Rescue Team (ASART) was invited to apply for full membership. An application including accounts and reports was submitted in December and we were delighted to be informed on 3rd February 2020 that the Team's application to be a Full Voting Member of the MREW CIO had been successful following an unanimous recommendation by the Membership Panel.

As a result of the acceptance ASART is very pleased to be able to continue to operate as a Full Member of the MREW. CIO status offers certain administrative and governance advantages some of which are, in turn, bestowed on the Full Voting Members.

ASART is also a member of the North Wales Mountain Rescue Association (NWMRA).

During the year 2019-20 the following positions were held within the team. The Committee met quarterly and minutes of the meetings were published on the members' page of the team website.

Chairman	Dave Williams, MBE
Team Leader	Chris Dunn
Secretary	Gareth Thomas
Treasurer	Graham O'Hanlon
Medical	Martin Green
Equipment	Geoff Brittain
Training	Paul Aslin
Recruitment	Nick Young
Fundraising	Ian Pilcher
Water Rescue	Gareth Davies
Technical Rope Rescue	John Weale
Vehicles	Ben Wells
IT	Huw Evans
Press & PR	Graham O'Hanlon
Other Committee Members	Chris Malyon, Dugald Cameron

Team Leader / Operations

Although the last month has been uniquely quiet, novel and challenging for all of us, due to the Covid-19 restrictions, it marks the end of another 12 month period that has been a successful one for the team. Our skills and experience have continued to expand and we should rightly be proud of the professional standard of service we have provided.

This is of course due to the tremendous dedication and hard work of all team members to attend training and develop their skills and then to make themselves available for callouts, often at the least convenient times. Our ability to respond effectively to callouts at all times of day and night, and mid-week is one of our great strengths. A massive thank you to everyone for

this, and especially to the team officers who take on administrative and organisational tasks, without which the role of team leader would be totally untenable.

During the year the team responded to 44 incidents, assisting 53 people and 1 dog. This involved 1530 rescuer-hours. Of these incidents, 21 were on Cadair Idris and 23 involved an injury. 11 of our incidents required the assistance of a helicopter.

Further analysis of the callout data shows a typical cross-section of contributing factors (inexperience, bad decision making, inadequate equipment, bad visibility) while injuries are mostly confined to lower limb and ankle. Our 'typical' casualty would, perhaps unsurprisingly, be a 25-60 year old male, on Cadair Idris, on a Saturday in September with a lower limb injury requiring pain relief, splinting and stretcher evacuation.

Whilst most of these statistics reflect a typical year of team callouts there seems to be increases in mountain bike injuries (which due to the nature of the pursuit tend to be more serious) and in those who have become lost due to bad weather or incompetence. Our use of both Coastguard and Air Ambulance helicopters has increased.

We have also expanded the pool of senior team members who take the initial call from the Police and develop the response required. This means we can respond quickly and effectively without onerous rotas and that it is not the responsibility of one individual to always be available. My thanks to these new Call Handlers for taking on this challenging role.



We currently have 45 team members, of which 6 are new members this year and 8 have ten or more years' service. These numbers are in line with other teams in North Wales and indicate a healthy, vibrant team. They also point to the continued need for an effective training programme and for individuals to put themselves forward for new roles and challenges. I have found that we are tremendously supportive and appreciative of such offers.

It has been a great honour and privilege to be involved with the team in the Team Leader role over the past seven years. I have been continually humbled and amazed by the team's fantastic response to incidents and training at all times of day and night, all types of weather and incident. In this time we have seen great strides in the team's capabilities, including two new vehicles and parking, a step change in casualty care and other skill levels, greatly improved team finances, equipment, systems & communication and new groups with capabilities in water and rope rescue, all of which reflects the tireless efforts of a great many people. Thank you! I will certainly do everything I can to make the transition for the new Team Leader as seamless as possible and know I can rely on the team to do the same.

Finances

The Accounts Statement is attached as Appendix 1. The team has been fortunate to enjoy another comfortable year financially, and after almost £19k of spending we end the year with reserves of £40k, slightly lower than at the start of the year. The fact that we can deliver the service that we do on less than £20k a year is something of which we can be proud.

As our income falls below the £25k threshold for requiring external examination, this will not be necessary this year; a job that would have been particularly challenging in the current Covid-19 restrictions.

Donations remain our strongest source of income as detailed in the following section. We claim Gift Aid where possible and reclaim VAT on eligible purchases. At the year end there is over £1,700 in outstanding VAT to reclaim and no significant liabilities.

£4k has been spent on buildings and storage. This is mostly rental costs for the Dolgellau lock-up, but also includes materials for the drying-room development currently underway, and latterly the supply of electricity to the site

The total equipment spend of around £7,500 included £1,500 for Technical Rope Rescue and £800 for Water Rescue. The remainder was made up of general Team purchases and included a Gazebo, the latest Paramo waterproofs issue to some individuals, head-torches and hand-torches, and merino skull-caps to fit under helmets.

The training expenses cover room hire for indoor sessions, and external training related expenses such as accommodation and course fees. Seven Members of the SRT group attended a "rescue from vehicles trapped in water" course provided by Cardiff International White Water Centre at a cost of almost £3,000.

Fundraising

This year we have maintained a good level of fundraising activity. Our success in the period has undoubtedly stemmed from our standing in the community and maintaining good local connections. The team has continued to benefit from being invited to provide support at local events such as: Taren Hendre Fell Race, Ras Yr Aran, Ras Y Gader, Race the Train, Dyfi Enduro as well as other local events and shows. Whilst these activities don't always result in a donation, it is important for us to nurture and maintain these relationships and develop the team's local profile.

During the year we received an amazing £6,388 from Co-op's Community Fund at the Tywyn store. The team was also successful in its application for the latest round running for an 11

month period from November 2019 – October 2020. Additionally, we have been encouraged to apply for the next round of the fund which starts in November this year. Our continued success with Coop has made a significant difference to team finances with receipt of circa £22k over the last 2½ years.

As always there have been many one-off donations during the year from those whom we have helped on the hill and other cash donations. There were a total of 59 donations and these are some of the more notable:

• Dyfi Enduro	£1,500
• Donation by Family of Team Member	£625
• Nick Smyth (Memorial Donations)	£611
• Nifty Fifties	£580
• Dinas Mawddwy 50 mile cycle	£517
• Ras y Gader	£300
• Sio Abergonolwyn	£250

Having started the year with a fairly stable financial position we have made few grant applications in the period but these include: Blakemore Foundation (Monetary Grant) and Tesco (Bags of Help Covid – Cause).

Collection boxes continue to bring in steady donations with certain locations proving more lucrative than others. We plan to review collection box locations in the hope of realising a greater level of income and team members are asked to put forward suggestions for collection box locations.

In June, the team's online donations portal (BT Mydonate) closed. Virgin Money Giving was approved by the committee as its replacement. The platform brings in a steady stream of income and Gift Aid on donations.

The contribution of the core of team members who regularly turn out to support local events, attend collections and represent the team at PR events is very much appreciated. Whilst fundraising and PR is undoubtedly a less heroic side of team activities, it should be considered as integral a part of being a team member as turning up to call outs. All team members are urged to play an active role in this area.

Training

15 full-team training sessions over the past year have had an average attendance of 20 people – maintaining the high level of recent years. We have continued the "First 15" sessions at the start of most training events in which we cover a brief overview of a specific topic or a short practical exercise, independent from the main subject of the day and usually relating to Casualty Care. All these sessions have been organised and led by team members and thanks are due to everyone who has put the time in to making this training programme a success.

Two sub groups in the areas of Technical Rope Rescue and Water Rescue have separate programmes of additional training (9 and 8 sessions respectively including one joint session). To make time for these and to address some concerns over the total time commitment on some team members the number of full-team sessions has been reduced slightly from previous years.

External training opportunities attended this year:

- Live helicopter winch training {10 people in 4 sessions}
- Search Managers update {3}
- Rescue from vehicles in water {7}
- NWP Response Driving {2}
- 4 x 4 Off-Road Driving {4}
- Party Leaders {2}
- MREW Casualty Care {8}
- Introduction to Mountain Rescue {3}

On-line Computer Based Training for each of two helicopter aircraft types must be completed by each team member annually in order to comply with UK-SAR Helicopter procedures and for team members to be permitted to work around aircraft. Compliance with this requirement within the team is generally very good and to help enforce it any team members who lapse have been removed from the call-out list until they have completed the necessary on line training.



The team has a high proportion of qualified casualty carers for whom certification must be renewed within three years. This is proving more and more difficult to achieve and the availability of training and assessment places across North Wales has reduced in recent years. In future it is likely to become necessary to prioritise the offer of places on these courses and strike a balance between experienced team members requiring re-certification and newer members seeking to gain new skills.

Since March 2020 the national restrictions relating to Covid-19 have curtailed the training programme and as the duration of these restrictions remains unclear we are developing a programme of virtual training sessions to maintain some core skills and team cohesion.

Recruitment

The team has a robust method for recruiting and training new recruits to the team in cohorts. Once the committee decides there is value in expanding team numbers (ie, once current trainees are at or near achieving full team member status), then all those on the holding list are invited to an informal assessment hill day, where they meet several experienced team members, to find out what's involved in team membership, and take part in several exercises (such as navigation, work on steep ground, casualty care) to assess their skill level. Applicants are then either accepted as probationers, given constructive feedback on any gaps that require work and invited to apply again, or theoretically, told that we do not think them suitable. Probationers are assigned an experienced mentor and serve a period as probationary members, typically around three months, where they attend training but not callouts, and thereafter, if assessed by mentors and the committee as suitable, will progress to trainee status, and can attend callouts as well as training. Trainees keep a log of training and callouts, and have regular discussions with their mentors to track progress and close gaps in experience.

A keen trainee, attending regular training sessions and callouts, can expect to achieve full team-member status in around a year, although this is very variable.

January 2019 saw three new probationers join. One of these left as his work moved away, and the remaining two became full team members in March 2020.

January 2020 saw a large recruitment day and six new probationers joined the team.

Medical

A casualty care course plus assessment was run in partnership with the Aberglaslyn and South Snowdonia teams in the autumn. Our medical officer supported delivery and gave additional support and practice opportunities to our participants but we are most grateful to South Snowdonia for organizing the course. Congratulations to the seven team members who passed the exam and one more who recertified elsewhere. Covid-19 has meant no more courses can be run for the foreseeable future, those who need re-examining this year have had their certificates extended by 6 months. When the time is right we will need to act quickly to organise a casualty care course and exam.

First aid elements are embedded in most of our training sessions and most of the “First 15” sessions are on medical subjects. Dedicated sessions have been run on skills updates, psychological resilience and specific children’s issues. The team are enthusiastic in their support for first aid training and demonstrate a very good overall level of competence. We undertake regular checks and replacement of equipment and medical consumables. Our first aid kits have been reorganised to be more modular and user friendly. PPE has been upgraded in view of Covid challenges.

Technical Rope Rescue

This was the second year of a two-year programme designed to consolidate the basics of rope rescue in the first year, and move onto more advanced techniques in the second year. During the report period, Rope-techs met for nine training sessions, four of these were full day and five were evening meets, all held at various locations within our operational area.

The group currently has eighteen members. All have rock climbing experience and this is a basic requirement for group membership. Five left and one joined during the year. There are eleven qualified Rope Rescue Technicians. Further course places are being sought for next year to expand the number of qualified members.

There were no ‘live’ rope rescue call outs to assist members of the public this year, but Rope-techs deployed our rope rescue system to rescue a dog from mine workings in the Dylife area. The high level of the Rope-tech group’s competency was demonstrated on the last training session of 2019 with the construction of a highline and reeve system. This system can be used to gain access to and extract casualties from otherwise inaccessible locations. Multiple station stretcher lowers and night time deployment were also practiced.

Next year’s training programme has been shaped by returns from a comprehensive skills questionnaire that Rope-techs completed towards the end of 2019.



Vertical stretcher lowering, edge transition.

Water Rescue

Within the Aberdyfi Team we have 10 qualified Swiftwater Rescue Technicians (SRT) who train regularly outside of normal team training to practice the skills needed in the event of a deployment regionally or nationally to a water rescue incident or mass flooding event. The team has associated specialist equipment including rafts, throw lines and personal protective equipment to be able to fulfil this role safely and effectively.



The SRT group was placed on standby for a number of the flooding events that hit north Wales over the last winter. We were called out to deal with passengers trapped in cars in the flooded underpass at Dolgellau, but in the event this was dealt with by Barmouth fire-crew who were first on scene.

7 SRTs attended a “rescue from vehicles trapped in water” course at Cardiff white water centre. This expensive but well received course expanded the capabilities of the water team and also served as a recertification for all who attended. Graham O’Hanlon is trained as a R3 SRT Instructor and has helped deliver courses for the Region, along with assisting in-house training. There has been a loss of capacity this year as some people have withdrawn from the group through other pressures, or have gone out of ticket. A regional SRT course was due to provide recertification for some members of the team, and a chance to qualify for a number of others but this had to be cancelled.

Members of the SRT group, along with call-handlers and other committee members have spent time this year developing our pre-plan for flooding events in the area, in particular Fairbourne. This has involved identifying a suitable command base, conducting a VHF coverage assessment from this position, pulling together suitable mapping resources, and consolidating our equipment provision in the light of the experiences of other Teams who were active in the Lake District and York flooding events in previous years.

Equipment

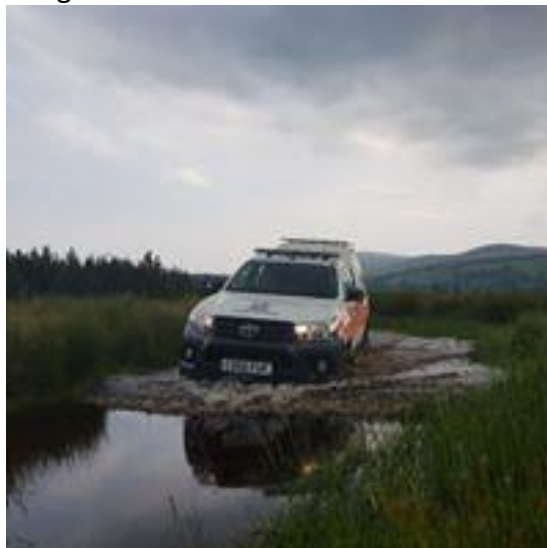
Purchases have been made during the year to replace or improve the equipment for rope rescue, water rescue and first aid. A 5m x 3m gazebo with team logos has been bought for fundraising events and as an adjunct to the roll-out awning attached to mobile 1 for search briefings etc. Personal kit issues to team members this year have included: hand-held torches, head torches, beanie hats and rucksack covers, in addition to a few more sets of winter weight waterproof jackets and trousers which have been issued to those who have met the 20% attendance threshold (training and callouts).

Vehicles

The team maintains two operational vehicles, each carrying a duplicate set of rescue equipment:

Mobile 1. 2013 VW Transporter LWB 4x4, kept in a dedicated garage at Outward Bound Centre, Aberdyfi. Registered as an Ambulance and with tow bar and light 4x4 capability for forestry tracks, etc. Normally used as the command and control vehicle at incidents with the mid section fitted out with seating around a table and computer screen. WiFi hotspot.

Mobile 2. 2016 Toyota Hilux 4x4. Kept in lock-up in Dolgellau. Also registered as an Ambulance this vehicle is equipped with off-road tyres and has full off-road capability within the constraints of the manufacturer's guidelines. A small number of team members have been trained in off-road driving using this vehicle.



Ifor Williams twin-axle box trailer (2018). Stored with mobile 2 in the Dolgellau garage, this trailer was purchased to transport bulky equipment to an incident, particularly water rescue equipment. It would normally be towed by the team vehicles but a list of team members and personal vehicles able to tow the trailer is being compiled in case this might be necessary.

Information Technology

During the year a refurbished W10 laptop has been donated to the Team which has been updated and will have the usual mapping software installed. This can be used as a back up device or for training on the mapping software as required.

Proposed changes in Team IT include the use of secure server space on a Google Drive account run by MREW to store all Team members' emails. This is designed to improve overall security by having one central email store and avoids sending emails to personal accounts with the potential for data leakage.

The Team uses SARCALL to notify members of Callouts and training events in the form of an SMS sent to members' registered mobile telephones and landlines. There is an email notification facility that can be used by any member as a back up or if mobile signal is patchy where they normally reside. The SARCALL procedure is simple and all Team members are conversant with the response protocol.

Other software currently used by the Team includes Traccar – a small application installed on smartphones that can be activated when leaving for a call-out. This allows call handlers to monitor progress to the RV in real time and gives an idea of resources available and the timescale until deployment

Recently What3Words has been widely marketed as a simple method of pinpointing a location anywhere on the globe to a 3m x 3m area. While not a substitute for the understanding and use of OS Grid Coordinates by hill walkers etc. it is already being used widely so the Team has had to investigate it's potential as a location method and how best to respond when given this information. Conversion to OS grid ref. is straightforward on Sarcall and also possible through Viewranger or a web based utility.

Publicity

This has been a business-as-usual year for the team PR, with a good take-up of our press-releases by the local and national press, often in a barely re-edited format (other than the change in name of the author). We choose to see this as a compliment to the writing and content. Whilst the press releases and our own website present our professional face, our social media output retains a slightly lighter and more humorous touch and maintains a good following. Team members are well briefed that no photographs or posts relating to training or incidents are to be uploaded to personal social media accounts.

A word from the Chairman

On behalf of our local community and the many visitors to our area, I thank all team members for their commitment to the various activities that come together in an effective and professional response to call-outs. As a team we are hugely grateful for the support received from other agencies including: Coastguard Helicopters; Ambulance; Police; etc as we work together effectively and safely for everyones benefit.

We do rely on the generosity of very many people to meet the cost of running and developing the effectiveness of our team. We thank you all. Diolch yn Fawr.

Appendix 1

Annual Accounts Statement

Balance Brought Forward 1/4/19		Balance	£41,165.60
		made up from:	
		Virtual Vehicle fund	£0.00
		and General fund	£41,165.60
Money in			
Income Box		£758.98	
Income Donation		£12,463.16	
Income MyDonate/Virgin Giving		£2,212.85	
Income VAT refund		£2,226.03	
Income Personal clothing/equip		£32.96	
Income MR Grant		£313.80	
Income misc		£0.00	
Expenditure			
Personal clothing/equip	-£32.96		
Administration	-£276.01		
Building & Storage	-£4,360.35		
Training	-£3,877.96		
Medical	-£90.30		
Vehicle	-£667.36		
Fuel	-£1,910.25		
Equipment	-£7,561.84		
		-£18,777.03	£18,007.78
Ring-Fenced			
Virtual Vehicle fund 18/19			£0.00
Sub total (19/20)			-£769.25
Total			£40,396.35
		made up from:	
		Virtual Vehicle fund	£0.00
		General fund	£40,396.35