



News from the Lakes Region – December 2008

There are two contributions from the Lake District on the subject of water rescue in this issue of the magazine, Howie Crook, Kendal MRT has written an article relating to the problems associated with water rescue and a few basics about getting it right. His article is written around two specific swift water rescue incidents that occurred on the 25th/26th October. The following article covers both the Mountain Marathon and the busy weekend that ensued for the Lake District's teams.

Water, water everywhere!

The Lake District fells made national headlines again over the weekend of the 25th and 26th October, the weekend of the Original Mountain Marathon (OMM). Run over the weekend when there was forecasted extreme weather following on from a week of just plain awful weather, opinion was divided as to whether the event should have started on the Saturday morning or been cancelled.

The organisers had contacted Mark Hodgson several weeks before the event to advise the extremes of the routes and the overnight checkpoints. Exact locations of checkpoints were not provided to the rescue teams before the event – not sure why, All Team Leaders on whose 'patch' the event would traverse were informed. At no time were Teams asked if the event should take place neither in the days leading up to, nor on the morning of the event. It is not mountain rescue's position to give such advice; we are only there if needed if there are casualties. None of the Lake District teams were involved in providing first aid cover or safety cover to the event (This does raise an interesting point for debate if Teams do get involved in marshalling such events.)

The first call for assistance came to the Keswick team at 11.45 a.m. on the Saturday morning; 2 people with hypothermia above Rigghead Quarries in Borrowdale. As luck would have it one of KMRT deputies was working in the area and was able to raise the alarm when the informant descended toward Rosthwaite. KMRT had just despatched their first lead vehicle with 6 onboard to this incident when the next call came in; 2 runners with fractured ankles in Gillercombe and 1 with head-injuries near Sty-Head. Keswick MRT leader at this stage called for the assistance of Penrith MRT and Cockermouth MRT; a discussion with the Aeronautical Rescue Co-ordination Centre (ARCC) Kinloss, regarding helicopter availability resulted in RAF Leeming MRT being tasked from their training location for the weekend in Ullswater. A total of 70 rescuers were operating on the Borrowdale side of the central fells at this stage.

Contact with the race organiser was maintained by one of the Keswick team members who lives at Seathwaite with messages being passed back to Keswick base regarding incident locations etc; teams were then tasked to the various locations. A total of 11 casualties were treated by the teams operating in Borrowdale; lower leg injuries, hypothermia and minor head injuries, all probably caused by casualties slipping or by being blown off their feet.

The weather was, as forecasted, extreme; high winds and torrential extended periods of rain throughout the morning and afternoon. Mark Hodgson KMRT Leader recalled that he had been out in some fairly extreme conditions on rescues with the most memorable being on Skiddaw one New Years Eve. The weather on this OMM day

was the most extreme non-winter weather he had experienced. News reports stated that hundreds of competitors were missing over night with large-scale searches being undertaken. This was incorrect; no MRT's were involved in searching overnight. Mark Hodgson had already advised that it was too high a risk to put team members out in that weather overnight when the only chance of finding anyone was to trip up over them. An RAF helicopter was brought in at first light on the Sunday to fly the routes, accompanied by members of Cockermouth MRT; all competitors were eventually accounted for by the Sunday afternoon.

Teams were active until about 10.00 p.m. on the Saturday night. Casualties were evacuated from the hills by the teams then transported over Honister Pass (now the river Honister) down the Buttermere valley to meet with ambulances at Lorton some 10 miles away due to flooding in the Buttermere valley (later compounded by a landslide). Access to and from Seathwaite via Borrowdale had been impossible since mid afternoon, with the rivers bursting their banks in several places. Keswick's lead vehicle that had attended the first incident of the day was trapped behind Castle Crag, Borrowdale by floodwaters that had risen during the rescue. It was parked up on higher ground overnight, all the gear taken from it ready for the next incident, and recovered the next morning.

Keswick team descended to Seathwaite with some of their casualties, the evacuation from Seathwaite at 5 pm was through water that was bonnet deep on the Landrovers – the bow waves causing the cars parked either side of the Seathwaite road to float gently outwards allowing a route through! It was during the descent to Seathwaite from Gillercombe (on the north side of Sour Milk Gill as access across the river to Seathwaite was uncertain and descent via the normal track could have resulted in the teams being stranded with their casualty) that Mark Hodgson, via Keswick Control requested that the Police call this as a Major Incident and instigate Gold, Silver and Bronze command to deal with what could have been (and was) hundreds of competitors getting off the hill and being unable to either get back to their cars (warm dry clothing, food etc) or to get out of Seathwaite due to the flooding. This 'Major Incident' call was apparently never instigated by the Police.

2.15 p.m. - Whilst the teams were busy on the Seathwaite side of the mountain, a '999' call came in to Ambulance Control regarding an incident on the Wasdale side. A female competitor in a team of two had been swept away down the swollen Spouthead Gill where it met with Lingmell Beck (Wasdale side of Styhead Pass). Wasdale MRT were immediately called out and approximately 20 team members attended. Unprecedented rainfall and high winds had flooded the valleys and swollen the rivers. The missing walker was located on an island in the middle of the raging gill. She was located on a very small island with a number of injuries. A further 4 walkers and competitors had gone to assist her but were also stranded. 4 Wasdale swift water technicians managed to get to the location and two got across to the island using ropes. A Sea King helicopter that had been called in to assist in the search for the lost walker was brought in to winch all 7 off the island which was quickly becoming engulfed. The injured and hypothermic female was stretcher winched. All were flown to Whitehaven Hospital. This Incident closed at around 6.30 p.m.

5.00 p.m. - Whilst the above rescue was being dealt with a further request came in to assist a female participant from the Dartmoor area who had sustained a shoulder injury and had managed to get down to the Wasdale Head Hotel but the road ambulance could not get up the valley due to the flooded roads. The team transported the casualty to the ambulance by landrover. Two team members involved.

A total of 11 casualties were assisted by the joint efforts of Keswick, Cockermouth, Penrith and RAF Leeming, with a further 6 requiring the assistance of Wasdale, SARDA and a Sea-King helicopter from RAF Valley, Anglesey

The above rescues related to the OMM however there were several more rescues that weekend that were totally unrelated to the marathon but very much related to the severe weather conditions and required some significant MRT involvement.

At 4.38 p.m. on the Saturday afternoon a family, with a 5-year-old child were reported as trapped on the wrong side of a stream up Rossett Gill. The Langdale and Ambleside MRT (LAMRT) was dispatched to recover them, but were informed that they had got down safely while they were en-route. Getting through to the end of the Langdale valley was very difficult, with significant flooding and abandoned vehicles.

At 5.35 p.m. the Kirkby Stephen MRT (KSMRT) team was called by police to help a Duke of Edinburgh (DofE) party of 5 seventeen year old girls who were stranded in very bad weather high in the Central Howgill Fells. The team had been able to make contact with the girls, one of whom had a minor ankle injury. 19 KSMRT members responded including 2 search dogs. Two fast search groups were deployed to search an area north of The Calf. The girls were located close to their expected position. Their supervisor who had been missing since 6.30 p.m. was also found with them having just reached their position. The group was escorted to safety and the team stood down at midnight. The girls had followed all instructions given by phone and had managed to find some shelter by wrapping a collapsed tent around themselves.

At 6.28 p.m. the Langdale and Ambleside MRT (LAMRT) were called out again to rescue a group of 3 walkers who had become separated when one managed to cross a stream that the others weren't able to. They had only gone for a 'short walk' because of the weather! They had no torches, so had to stop moving once it went dark. They were eventually located at 3.15 a.m. on the Sunday morning by Kendal MRT members who had come to assist after LAMRT had been out in atrocious conditions for 4 hours. The evacuation was made difficult by the speed and volume of water flowing. The training and equipping for swiftwater rescue (SWR) by both teams has now been used on many occasions, and made these situations safer, if not actually any more comfortable! [This incident has been covered in greater detail in the second article]

At 4.16 a.m. the following Sunday morning, Wasdale MRT were contacted by Ambulance Control to assist in a medical emergency at the Wasdale Head Hotel. A 10 year old boy staying at the cottages had suffered a severe asthma attack and needed hospitalization. The roads were flooded even more than the previous afternoon (Wastwater had risen 3 to 4 foot and covered the roads with 2 foot of water. Three team members including the team doctor attended, gave medical assistance and transported the boy to the waiting ambulance at Overbeck. Incident closed at around 7.00 a.m. 4 team members involved.

At 4.30 a.m. on the Sunday the Langdale and Ambleside MRT were requested by Police to check a vehicle for occupants that had been stuck in a flood. They were found to be OK and were going to have to sit out and wait for a recovery vehicle

when water had subsided. By this time the journey to Langdale involved going to Grasmere first, being the only route where the road was still passable.

At 8.00 p.m. on the Sunday, the Wasdale MRT were contacted by police to assist 8 walkers who had become lost on the Wasdale Screes path below Low Adam Crag. 8 team members attended and managed to locate the group at 8.45 p.m. and walk them back up the Lake path to the road head at Brackenclose - the team were unable to get the vehicle to Brackenclose due to flood waters. Incident closed at 10.00 p.m.

There then ensued the press furore!

Learning from the event

The multi-agency debrief was held on the 26th November at Cumbria Police Headquarters in Penrith. LDSAMRA teams were represented by Mark Hodgson, Team Leader Keswick MRT and Mike Park, Team Leader Cockermouth MRT – one of the main outcomes from the debrief was for improvements in communication between the Police and the other agencies involved. Mountain rescue was recognised for its significant contribution to both effective communication and the safe evacuation of those injured during the event. A stated outcome of the multi-agency debrief was issued as a press statement from the Cumbria Local Resilience Forum the same day....."Following a debate, it was agreed that the Cumbria Local Resilience Forum would establish an event list. A risk prioritisation of each event disclosed to us [CLRF] could then be undertaken, and if a multi-agency response is required, the relevant agencies can come together and plan their response accordingly. This will ensure that the communities of Cumbria and the people who visit and work in the county are assured a measured response from all the agencies who serve them." LDSAMRA teams will, as always, be willing to work alongside the police and other emergency service to ensure the county is adequately covered.

The weekend of the 25th and 26th October 2008 will always be remembered for the worst wet weather conditions the county had experienced for decades and indeed, conditions never experienced before by most team members. However, it will also be remembered for the generosity of those OMM participants and supporters who raised over £10,000 following the event and the recognition by the organisers of the OMM who donated the £7,000 of prize monies to the Lake District teams as a thank you for being there when needed.

Many thanks to Mark Hodgson, Mike Park, Julian Carradice, Michael Saint, Nick Owen and my other mountain rescue colleagues who contributed to this article. Also to Howie Crook who has written the follow up article which addresses the basics of swift water rescue.

Where-wolf grid reference finder

It's over a year since LDSAMRA, volunteered to take a lead in the national campaign promoting mountain rescue safety awareness. There have been a number of initiatives taken to address the growing problem of walkers being ill prepared, ill equipped and ill experienced. One possible solution centered on a simple and inexpensive aid for navigation. A small family business in the south of England had already developed a grid reference card to help their friends more accurately

calculate grid references / determine their location. In November 2007 the opportunity was taken to work with Wher-wolf.com and use the card to encourage walkers to actually go out and buy a map and compass and learn how to them. Jenny and Danny Turner, owners of Where-wolf.com were keen to support mountain rescue and agreed to contribute a significant percentage of sales to MR(E&W) and use their product and their website to get all the required messages across. For every special issue card sold, £1.00 is donated to MR(E&W) – they have been sending cheques to MR(E&W) every 3 months as the cards are sold.

Twelve months later and where are we.....(excuse the pun)



Below are the figures for Where-wolf sales and site visits as requested:

During the period December 2007 to the end of October 2008 they have raised £821.00 for Mountain Rescue (England & Wales)

46% of the cards we sold during this period were MR cards, which I think shows that the message is definitely getting through, and people, are making a conscious decision to support this campaign by choosing to pay the extra £1.00 which goes to mountain rescue.

On average, their website has had been between 20 – 50% more site visitors than last year. Some of this of this may be down to their own marketing and link sharing, but the majority of this is undoubtedly due to the growing interest and awareness of Mountain Rescue's campaign.

If their overall web sales are taken into account, including Ebay sales, plus the freebies they have and are continuing to give away, plus the bulk orders from the Police, Armed Forces and organised groups; Jenny and Danny have gone through over 5,000 cards this year. Some of these sales are overseas but 95% are to the UK.

Of course, not all visitors to their site buy the grid reference cards, but they are at least being exposed to the mountain rescue safety campaign message. 5,000 is a lot of cards in use helping those who get themselves lost to use their map and compass as their first pocket to go for rather than their good old unreliable mobile phone.

Jenny and Danny are also putting the little "Mountain Rescue Facts" cards, which LDSAMRA produced for the 5th July 75th anniversary Celebrations, in with every order (although now running a bit low, and might need to consider producing something similar themselves soon!)

You can help with the campaign by encouraging your supporters to visit the site, by buying discounted cards directly from Jenny as team merchandise or pro-actively getting your local outdoor shops to display and sell them. Jenny and Danny will definitely not become multi-millionaires as a result of your efforts (when I met them in

July they came up the Lakes in their old 110 landrover, leaving the Ferrari at home) but the numbers of maps, compasses and hopefully torches out there on the fells will increase as the months go by.

If you have any questions or comments on this article or indeed any of the Lake District articles or statements made then please contact me and I will ensure that you receive a response.

Richard Warren
Regional Chairman / Secretary (LDSAMRA)
5th December 2008