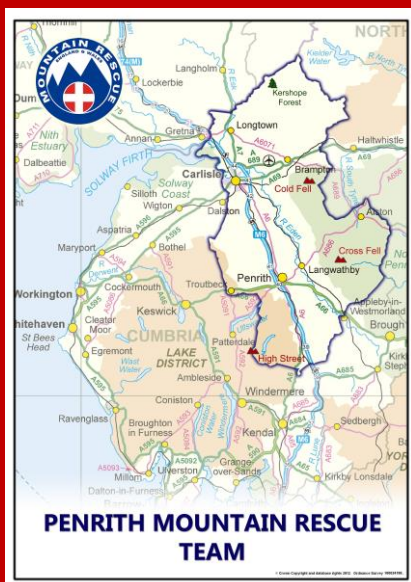


PENRITH MOUNTAIN RESCUE TEAM

Celebrating 55 years in 2014

2014 sees the Penrith Mountain Rescue Team (PMRT) reach a specific mile stone with 55 years of service to the Penrith area. To mark this occasion we have two articles from our longest and newest members sharing their experience of team life and showing how things have changed over the decades. In the early days the team comprised of farmers who used gates as stretchers and horses and carts to transport the casualties. Things have moved on a little since then! Read on to hear two very different accounts of team life. Plus a little more from other team members and how they manage being a volunteer 24/7 365 days of the year.

PMRT covers the largest geographical area of any of the Lake District Mountain Rescue Teams, taking in 965 sq miles. The area stretches from the Scottish Border to the depths of Haweswater and from the Northumberland border to the Solway Firth, including the towns of Carlisle, Penrith and Brampton.



Our population at risk is therefore varied – Farmers, Tourists, keen ramblers on the Crossfell leg of the Pennine Way, and unlucky locals caught in bad weather or suffering from ill health.

The team is also on call to assist other Lake District and National teams as required. Additionally the Police can, and do, request our manpower and expertise in searches and emergency situations such as floods and major transport incidents. As such team members are on call 24/7 with the aim that response is as prompt as possible.

PMRT is a registered charity and like all Mountain Rescue teams in England and Wales relies entirely on donations, bequests and the generosity of the public to fund their running costs.

WHAT DOES MOUNTAIN RESCUE INVOLVE?
LET'S HEAR FROM ONE OF THE NEWEST AND THEN ONE OF THE OLDEST SERVING MEMBERS OF THE TEAM.

Lisa – 3 years in the team

My name is Lisa, I am 26 years old and currently a probationary member of Penrith Mountain Rescue Team. I have been in the team for just under 3 years and initially joined as a non-operational team member and operated our communication systems during callouts. After having done the communications role for around 2 years, I then decided that I would like to become an operational team member and I have now been a probationer for around a year.

I am enjoying my time as a probationer. It is challenging and there is a lot to learn, but the training sessions twice a month provide the opportunity to practice and develop my skills. The other team members are very friendly and are always happy to help the newer people to the team.

I currently work for the Environment Agency. In my job I often have to travel and stay away from home overnight so sometimes it can be difficult to attend meetings and training sessions. One Sunday a month we spend the day training and some months we may also be fundraising. It can be a challenge sometimes fitting in work, training and callouts, but overall I find it very satisfying and rewarding being a volunteer for Mountain Rescue.

Keith – 47 years in the team

My first experience of mountain rescue was in 1954 during a climbing trip. Two climbers had fallen and one had two broken legs. A successful rescue took over 13 hours. Wanting to be involved regularly I joined Penrith Mountain Rescue Team 1966.

The occupations of members then were varied, as now. There were motor mechanics, a bus driver, ambulance driver, and the boss of the golf ball on Great Dunfell, a technician at BBC Skelton, company director, a civil servant (me) and teachers. At one time we had 3 men of the cloth – not available on Sundays! Members came from Penrith and surrounding area but there were no female members in the early days. We met in a Pub once a month.

Team equipment was minimal consisting of spare gear from members and army surplus bought with funds raised from street collections, raffles and coffee mornings.

In the event of a call out, maybe 10 in a busy year, the Team Leader telephoned nominated people who then rang those in their group with a rendezvous. We went to incidents in our own vehicles with the first aid kit, stored under the Team Leader's bed, and a 'Thomas' stretcher.

A major step forward was the purchase of the team's first Land Rover, ex army, for £255. Starting the vehicle (with a handle) was always a problem!

Radio communication was nonexistent until along came the Pye Bantam which we had to buy. We had two portables and a base set. These were cumbersome, heavy and unreliable. It wasn't until 1999 that the team got its first proper base a, the current location. I look upon the Team as a club with a purpose. Locating a casualty or missing person and bringing them to a safe place is very satisfying, but it is a Team effort. Without the constant chat and looking out for each other it won't work.

Having passed the age of 75 and no longer insured to drive Team vehicles or go out on rescues I have become a non operational member – it has been an interesting 47 years.



HOW DO OTHER TEAM MEMBERS PLAY THEIR PART IN THE TEAM?

Matt – Acting Medical Officer

I am a pretty ordinary full time team member. Happy to head up a mountain in (very nearly) all weather conditions at any time of day or night. However, to assist with the running of the team I have taken on an additional role with two main areas of responsibility.

The first of these responsibilities is maintenance of the medical equipment in our three ambulances. We need a lot of medical equipment to treat the huge range of injuries we come across, both trauma and illness. We have so much equipment in each of our ambulances that it would take seven people to transport it all up a mountain.

This is a lot to maintain, and it doesn't last forever. All mountain rescue equipment has a hard life being used in harsh conditions. The medical equipment is no exception; it is taken out in extreme weather on challenging terrain. It is used up, worn out and sometimes gets broken. Some equipment, including drugs and sterile items, just simply expire as the 'use by' date is reached. Equipment therefore needs checking, repairing, replacing and checking again. Not an easy job or a cheap one.

The second responsibility is the part that I play in organising our teams Casualty Care Certification. This is essentially a mountain rescue specific advanced first aid course which enables us to use certain medication and pain relieving drugs. A lot of training is required for this as many skills need to be learnt and then remembered. We are assessed every three years in a series of four examinations including practical scenario tests and a paper-based test. The next round of this exam is scheduled for January 2014, so time for me to stop writing this and time to start swatting up.



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MOUNTAIN RESCUE TEAM

Mike – Team Leader

Having spent many years enjoying the outdoors I took the decision in 2004 to join Penrith Mountain Rescue Team. I wasn't sure at the time with living in Carlisle if they would be interested, turned out a large number of the team live and work in the Carlisle area. After an induction period I became a probationer and an active member of the team. I will never forget the anticipation of waiting for my first call out and on one miserable night in November it came; a male and his dog were lost! I arrived at base and headed off in the land rover. We had to go off road and when the track ran out it was time to continue on foot. Visibility was awful but eventually we heard on the radio the missing person had been located and was being walked off the fell. Once the gent was checked over we dropped him off at home. 1st call out – Done!!

I spent the next year learning how MR functions, search techniques, crag work, casualty care, off road driving etc. Before I knew it I had completed my years' probation and was voted in as a full team member. I remember at the time feeling very proud as I was presented with some shiny new gear all badged up with Penrith MRT on it. In the years that followed I was given the opportunity of joining the committee as the finance officer, a very important role ensuring the team raise enough money to function. I was then asked whether I had considered standing for a deputy leader's role. It was humbling that people felt I had the skills to take on such a position. I was voted in and became a deputy leader. This brought with it many responsibilities including dealing with the initial contact from the Police. This can be daunting if dealing with missing people who have no idea where they are!

My proudest moment within the team came in 2012 when I was voted in as Team Leader. I was very honoured to have been given this role and I hope I can continue to serve the team to the best of my ability for as long as possible.

Mountain rescue can be very rewarding; the feeling of chatting to a missing person on the phone and then finding them on the fell is very special. Unfortunately the nature of what we do also means we end up dealing with seriously ill people and on some occasions fatalities.

The team is an integral part of the community and the image that we just work in the mountains is one that is slowly changing as people see us working in a variety of situations from assisting with flooding issues to urban searches.



PMRT 2013

The team had callouts in 2013, this is pretty much an average figure for the Penrith Team and they consisted of searches, rescues and assisting bordering teams.

Two notable incidents stand out in 2013. The first was the search of a 12 year old boy missing from his home. When you hear there is a missing child you immediately start to think of all possible scenarios. The search included multiple teams and the entire counties trained search dogs, plus teams on stand by. It was clear to see how serious this callout was being taken due to the Police presence. Once again the team showed its professionalism when working alongside the Police for which they were very appreciative. Thankfully, the child was located not far from his house up a tree!!

The second major call out of the year involved a male who had fallen a considerable distance into a ghyll. The casualty had serious head injuries which were classed as life threatening. The team quickly rigged a hauling system to raise the casualty from the ghyll before transporting him to the awaiting Helimed. Members then assisted the Helimed Doctor while emergency care was given prior to loading onto the helicopter. We received a letter of thanks from the casualty a few weeks later explaining he was making a steady recovery after his numerous operations for 3 skull fractures.

As we start 2014 we look forward to the New Year with anticipation and apprehension of what that next call from the Police will lead to????

www.penrithmrt.org.uk