



A year in the life of Penrith Mountain Rescue Team

One Year of 'Shouts'

2006 was the busiest year for Penrith Mountain Rescue Team (PMRT) since it was founded in 1959. Members were involved in a total of 49 incidents, covering the whole range of types of call out across the entire length of their 'patch'. Throughout the year, the team has worked alongside all the emergency services, other Search and Rescue (SAR) teams, Armed Forces personnel and other voluntary organisations. They have also trained together on 36 occasions and devoted 14 days to fund raising collections. This is an account of some of the 'shouts' that together involved over 2800 man hours last year.

The pager lives with us. It becomes a constant companion; its insistent bleep can go off at any time to galvanise up to 40 Team members into action. It is no respecter of sleep, work or meal times. Last year it called 49 times, more than ever before in the team's 48-year history. Its call to action simply means 'get here fast' someone somewhere is in trouble and they need you NOW!

Most of us keep our kit in the boots of our cars ready for action. Getting dressed in 'hill kit' as quickly as possible, Thermoses filled, it is a rapid (though legal) sprint to Base, within which are the team's two 110 V8 Land Rovers and Command vehicle/ambulance all kitted, fuelled and ready to go. The 999 call that prompted the callout will have already been passed from Cumbria Police Control Room to the Team Leader who on the basis of his experience and judgement has decided to call out the Team.

Upstairs, at our Penrith 'Rescue Village' Base the Incident Management team will be already in and checking maps, switching on radios and starting to prepare the Incident Log and assessing the situation from the information received. Downstairs, vehicles will be rapidly checked, team members arriving at the trot will sign in and start to pick up snippets of information. Where? How many? Do we need any specialist equipment? Water rescue? Crag Rescue? Someone lost or reported missing?

Within minutes, if it's a search for lost or missing persons, the Search Manger will be briefing the growing group of volunteers on weather and the situation as known, strategy explained, roles allocated and the first 10 pack their personal kit into the Land Rovers, referred to as Mobiles 1 and 2 and the first search teams are away.

All this can be achieved in 15 minutes from the first Team member arriving at Base.

Mobile 3, an ambulance based on an LDV minibus that can be rapidly converted into a forward Control Room, may well be dispatched later if the situation demands the extra man power and the powerful communications link that it offers between Base and teams on the fell or at an urban location distant from Penrith.

2006 saw this scene repeated 49 times, the greatest number of callouts in PMRT's 48 year history.

The location and type of incident can vary hugely. The one thing that is certain is that the Team leadership and group leaders in the field will need to think rapidly on their feet, communicate clearly and concisely to manage a developing scenario.

There are two types of 'Shout'. A 'Crash Call' simply means, 'as fast as you can, everybody' because someone is either injured or has suffered a medical emergency in a location that is inaccessible to the Ambulance Service. A 'Search Call' means, 'someone is lost or missing and we need to find them', not quite as urgent, but nevertheless still a serious business, particularly if the weather is poor or light is fading.

The following incidents are typical of those that the Team attends and were the first of 2006, covering a period of 6 weeks.

Wednesday Afternoon. Thick fog and freezing conditions. 16 team members took 4.1 hrs to locate and assist in the rescue of a fallen ice climber (male aged 24yrs) within 20m of the top of Blea Water Beck (Grade III ice climb). Casualty had landed on his back fracturing his scapula, injuring his back. Airlifted by Sea King from RAF Boulmer and taken to the Cumberland Infirmary, Carlisle.

Saturday-Sunday Midnight. Freezing conditions. 16 team members responded to a call from Ambulance Control reporting a party member at Blackburn Bothy suffering from hypothermia. Party located and airlifted by Sea King helicopter (RAF Boulmer) to Cumberland Infirmary, Carlisle (CIC), one stretcher case, one unwell and one companion. Call-our duration 3 hrs.

Saturday Evening. Low cloud and drizzle. Overdue walker, Bampton Common. 5 team members. Stood down after 1 hr when walker returned safely.

Sunday Morning. Severe weather, heavy snow. Police request to assist with checks of occupants of vehicles stuck in drifting snow. Provision of team's 4x4's and specialist skills to patrol M6 and A5305 to allow police to check on safety of trapped drivers. Duration 6 hrs.

Tuesday Evening. Missing despondent in the Armathwaite area. 5 team members stood down after 1 hr when missing person located.

Wednesday. All night. 23 team members for a total of 45 hrs spread over one night and 3 days. Missing vulnerable person in the Hilton Fell/High Cup Nick area. Search conducted with other Mountain Rescue (MR) teams, MR search dogs, police and RAF Search & Rescue (SAR) helicopters with heat seeking equipment. No trace found. Some weeks later missing person found dead outside the extensive search area.

The variety and pace of the team's work never slackened throughout the year during which the team searched for and/or rescued 60 people. The youngest was just 6 year old. Locations included Mardale Head/Haweswater (x7), Cross Fell (x4), Carlisle (x3), Pennine Fells and Fellfoot (x7) plus a whole variety of individual places from Hadrian's Wall in the north of the team's patch to Shap Fells in the south. The Team also assisted other SAR teams in other areas of the county on 11 occasions.

The team logged just over team 200 hours (2,808 man hours) of operational duty in the year. An average of over 73hrs of callout time per team member. All funded by the generous support of the public. PMRT like all SAR teams do not receive any funding from local or national government and all time, whether on call outs or training or fundraising is given entirely voluntarily by team members. It is not always understood that 'Mountain Rescue' does not just mean rescue of people from the fells but from the urban environment too.

PMRT covers a huge area, not just the environs of Penrith. The Team's area includes a variety of terrains, villages, towns and the City of Carlisle. The highly trained team, the majority of whom are qualified to a high standard in first aid, is called upon to tackle a wide range of incidents whatever the weather conditions or time of day/night.

The year finished with just as busy a spell in December.

Friday. Mid afternoon. Heavy rain and flood alerts. A river bank search along the River Eden at Armathwaite involving 13 members for 2.5 hours. An upturned canoes 'with someone seen clinging to it' was reported by a member of the public in the swollen river. Coordinated search with Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) and RAF Boulmer's Sea King helicopter. Nothing found.

Monday. Person reported collapsed at Ruthwaite. PMRT assistance requested by Patterdale MRT. Helicopter evacuation to CIC. 9 members, duty 1 hr.

Same Monday. Late evening. Freezing conditions. 14 members for 3.5 hrs. search of River Eden banks for missing despondent following discovery of abandoned car. Cumbria FRS and Lancashire Police helicopter also involved. The casualty was located at midnight in a seriously hypothermic condition. Carry out for $\frac{3}{4}$ mile during which resuscitation was required. Taken by ambulance to CIC and later pronounced dead.

Sunday. Overcast. During the team's Christmas Eve Penrith collection. 25 members for 5.3hrs. A missing vulnerable person (bi-polar disorder) in the Fellfoot villages was located and brought home safely.