

Edition 1, April 1997

Welcome to the first issue of the West Brecon Cave Rescue Team newsletter. This is aimed at ALL Cavers and clubs who are active in the South Wales area and who are, or wish to be, a member of the West Brecon Cave Rescue Team.

This first edition is intended to combine the announcement of a new WBCRT initiative with historical and relevant information. This will begin an ongoing series of Newsletters which will provide an insight into developments in the area of Cave Rescue and specifically within the West Brecon Team. The Newsletter will be issued Quarterly and will be distributed widely so that all Cavers can have access to a copy, whether members of a club or otherwise.

Enjoy the read.

Gary Evans, Edition One Editor

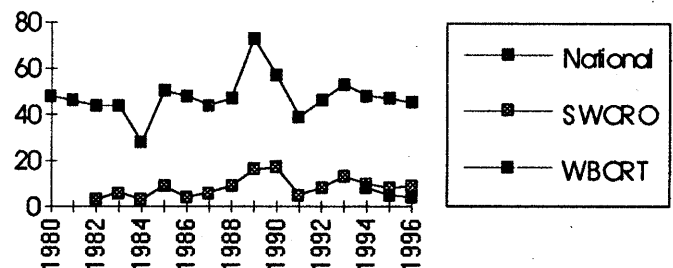
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Cave Rescue Readiness

One of the biggest problems faced by all Cave Rescue Teams in the UK is maintaining a level of interest in Rescue within the Caving Community. This is due to the relatively small number of 'real' Rescue incidents that occur and it leaves us with only practices in which to get the Team working well together. The chart below shows the National and Local incident statistics over the last 15 years and it can be seen that generally the trend is fairly static. Also bear in mind that very few of these are incidents which involve major callouts - which of course is a good news for cavers. It does however make it more difficult to maintain interest and enthusiasm and hence a state of Cave Rescue readiness.

Underground Incidents



This is the background to the changes happening in the West Brecon Rescue Team. Since early 1996, a tremendous amount of work has been done to rekindle enthusiasm, to get equipment and resources back into shape and to build on the good work that had been done over many years. The next step is to now develop the confidence and effectiveness of the Rescue Team itself, and this is why this Newsletter has been launched together with the new training initiative and the questionnaire.

GE

The Newsletter, The New Initiative and The Questionnaire

The reasons behind these new WBCRT undertakings, whilst many and varied, can be broken down essentially into :

1. The need to raise the profile of Rescue and communicate more readily with Cavers generally.
2. To cement relationships with existing members of the Team and show the importance of their involvement.
3. To give many more people the opportunity to join the rescue Team. To re-affirm that *any* Caver can be a member of the Team and that their input is highly valued, regardless of where they live and whether they belong to a club or not.
4. To initiate a means of gathering information about those people who wish to be involved in Rescues and thereby create a more accurate call out list and associated skills database
5. To put in place a scheme of modular training and self assessment that allows the members of the Rescue Team to confirm and increase their skill levels and hence enhance the effectiveness of the Team

There are two important points here.

1. The WBCRT executive committee recognises that there is not enough communication with the members of the Rescue Team and that there are misunderstandings about who is in the Team. *Anyone* who wants to be, can be a member of the Rescue Team and their contribution is important.
2. We need to know more about the skill levels of the Team members and to improve the effectiveness of the Call Out List

The New Initiative is basically an opportunity to improve skills and learn new ones. A modular training programme is being put together and a training checklist is being written that will be issued to *Every* Team member. Training will be offered on weekends in the day and evenings and during weekday evenings at a variety of venues. Team members will be encouraged to attend those sessions that they feel they would gain from. You read up on the skills required, you choose what training you want to do, you assess your own progress. However, some subjects, like advanced first aid, will be offered as certificated training.

The Training Checklists will be issued in around 8 weeks from now, and they will be issued as people return their Questionnaire. This is only to ensure that we get everyone's details and then send the Checklists to the right places. This also gives people the opportunity to decline inclusion on the Call Out List if they so wish.

So, fill your questionnaire in as soon as you can and return it to Sue Mabbett at the address shown on it. You will then receive your Training Checklist during May/June together with a list of training initiatives and dates.

GE

Ogof where ?

There are over 300 cave sites in the South Wales area. Talking to cavers active in the area it is obvious that the actual location of some of them is a mystery to many of us. Then there are the digs, the location of these is often a well kept secret. So, if there is an accident there may be a problem for rescuers in finding the cave and the entrance. Some sites involve long walks cross country and some nifty map and compass work. Of course it will be January, 10pm and pouring down just to complicate matters.

In order to make it easier for rescue teams to find their way to cave entrances that they may not be familiar with or in bad weather WBCRT is developing cave site route cards. These make use of permanent features of the landscape and basic compass work to guide teams to the cave. They are weatherproof laminated cards, including a description of how to reach the entrance, using text, photos and sketches.

Trials of these have been encouraging and a set to include the major sites in the Ystradfellte area has been designed and tested. Now we can find Theoretical Pot and we know our Ogof Shar Wlad from our Pwll Pindar. Plans are underway for sites on the Black Mountain area.

Brian Bowell

History of Cave Rescue in South Wales

Cave Rescue in South Wales began in 1946 with the formation of the South Wales Caving Club. Although run by the club initially on a fairly informal basis, the first rescue in 1951 in Ogof Ffynnon Ddu 1 was the impetus for many years of planning, creativity and hard work to create an effective rescue team. At this time, the team was called the South Wales Cave Rescue Organisation.

Early rescues included those in Bridge Cave and OFD in the 50's with the Llethrid rescue of 1964 giving Cave Rescue its first real credibility with the Police. Equipment in the early days was basic and many ingenious devices and designs appeared over the years, being developed and built by members of the rescue team. Examples are the floating stretcher which was designed and tested in the early 60's and also stemples which were introduced in South Wales at this time. Other developments included the introduction of the ticket board at South Wales Caving Club to enable tracking of groups going underground to take place and the introduction of the first purpose built telephones intended for Cave Rescue use.

The Gwent Rescue Team was formed in 1968 and in 1975, following the Roger Solari Rescue in which both Teams were involved, it was felt that an improved co-operation between the two South Wales Rescue Teams was needed. The SWCRO title was relinquished to enable a new regional organisation to adopt this name and the old SWCRO Team was re-formed and called the West Brecon Cave Rescue Team to cover the area west of the A470.

The period following this saw further improvements in techniques and equipment with new technology and methods being embraced. The WBCRT was instrumental in the change to different rope colours for pitch hauling and managed to persuade Edelrid to dye ropes specifically for this purpose. Also Flectalon was designed and introduced in this period.

The composition of the team was revised in 1991 to encourage greater participation by other clubs and individual cavers. At this time, the clubs included SWCC, Swindon SS, Croydon SS, Westminster SG and Amman Valley CC, some of whom were previously active in Cave Rescue.

An appeal was set up to aid the purchase of a new Landrover, to replace the one owned by SWCC. This was completed in 1991 with help from the Natwest Bank. The team achieved charitable status in 1993.

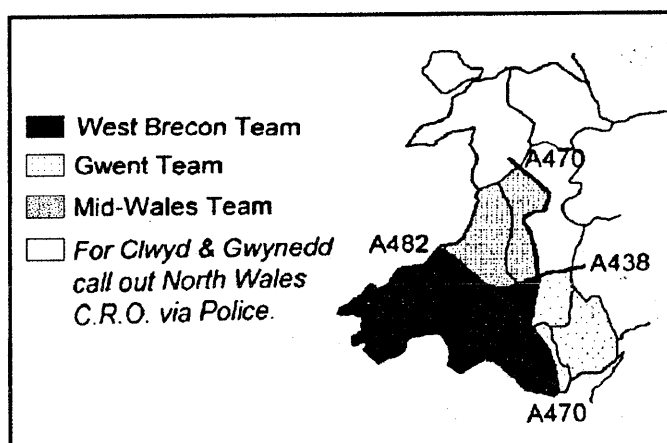
It was realised that there was a great potential for a call out to an incident in one of the many mines in the area and that we did not have the required expertise or equipment. To this end, Mid Wales cavers and mine explorers were approached. Since 1991, we have functioned as a single team with the ability to cover a mining callout. Further details of these developments can be found in SWCC newsletter no 110.

There is now a depot at Penwyllt (courtesy of SWCC), housing an extensive range of equipment and providing garaging for the Landrover. A secondary equipment dump is located at a warden's house near Welshpool.

The last year has seen a renewed enthusiasm within the WBCRT and the Executive has concentrated on updating, renewing and maintaining equipment and storage procedures, including necessary work on the Rescue Landrover. There is still much to be done and any input from Team members is gratefully received.

Next steps will see an emphasis on working with the members of the Team in training and development and in fund raising for essential projects to complete the ongoing work with equipment and facilities.

Bob Radcliffe & GE



South Wales Cave Rescue Organisation (SWCRO)

As described briefly in the previous article, Cave rescue in the Swansea valley was started in 1946 by members of the newly formed South Wales Caving Club, after the discovery of Ogof Ffynnon Ddu. The team called itself the South Wales Cave Rescue Organisation. In 1968, the Gwent Cave Rescue Team was formed after major discoveries in that area, and by June 1975 the two teams formed an umbrella organisation. This new body took the name SWCRO and the team formerly using this title took the name West Brecon Cave Rescue Team.

Basically, the SWCRO is a co-ordinating organisation, with the Gwent and West Brecon Rescue Teams taking care of the operational rescue requirements.

The objectives of the SWCRO are stated as being :

- o To assist the Police Authorities in Cave and Allied rescue work
- o To take responsibility for the creation and maintenance of an efficient callout system

However, other important roles are provided :

- o Representation of Cave Rescue for the South Wales area to the British Cave Rescue Council.
- o Representation of Cave Rescue to the Cambrian Caving Council and hence the NCA.
- o As a body of entitlement to grants on behalf of the operational Teams in South Wales.
- o As a good means of communication between the Gwent & West Brecon Rescue Teams (although this also happens directly between the Teams).

The SWCRO executive consist of 8 representatives, 4 from each Rescue Team. There are 3 officers and the current reps. (until Feb. 98 AGM) are :

WBCRT - Gary Evans (Chairman, SWCRO)
Bob Saunders (Treasurer, SWCRO)
John Lister
Brian Bowell

GCRT - Vaisey Bramley (Secretary, SWCRO)
Chris Brady
Phil Jane
Dave Crompton

The British Cave Rescue Council.

The BCRC is the representative body for cave rescue in the UK. At present, there are 16 member organisations. The council was formed in 1967 but became almost a privately run concern. After attending an international conference in 1979 in Poland, and suffering the self appointed 'Boss' of British cave rescue, several of the larger cave rescue teams were approached and the present format was established and has since become a real voice and force in national cave rescue concerns.

The BCRC role is entirely executive; it makes no rules or conditions upon the member teams who are independent within their own area. The BCRC maintains a very strict non-political code and avoids all suggestions, requests or involvement with cave politics. Advice and information is given on rescue matters only and an annual national incident report is produced. A biennial rescue conference is organised by the bigger organisations. The SWCRO has hosted two, the last in 1996, so our next turn should be in 2004/2006

Membership is open to all regional representative bodies. Applications for membership require sponsorship from a member, usually the nearest geographically. There seems to be little scope for further membership as we now have a 'full set' in terms of the whole of the UK being covered.

In some areas, such as South Wales, there is more than one team and the regional organisation (SWCRO) is the member. In other areas there is no regional organisation and it is a team that is a member, for example the Dales are represented by the CRO, Upper Wharfedale and Swaledale who are all individual members of the council. The Association of Chief Police Officers and the Mountain Rescue Council both have representatives on the council.

There are 5 elected officers. Chair, Treasurer, Training, Equipment, Conference and Medical and two ex officio members, the CDG and a Legal advisor. The BCRC meets once a year for a combined general meeting and AGM. The executive meets when necessary, and as a very flexible group others are drawn in as required.

The BCRC exists to present a national front to the Association of Chief Police Officers and such bodies as the Mountain Rescue Council, Sports Council and Home Office. Via links with these and other bodies cave rescue has a voice in matters such as BSI standards for mountaineering and caving equipment, allocation of radio frequencies and Sports Council grants.

The Council keeps a watching brief to ensure that cave rescue is represented and heard when it needs to be. An important role is that of providing a platform for information and technical exchange. Personal contacts are very useful, as seen by the recent exchange of information between the WBCRT and the CRO during the writing of First Aid manuals. Several bodies will only negotiate with national organisations and this is on its own a good reason why membership of the BCRC is essential and should be maintained.

Two areas in which the BCRC plays a fundamental role are insurance and national grant aid. There are two insurance types - third party liability and personal accident cover. Both are valid to all members of cave rescue teams - and those who are impressed on the day - so if you are called out, asked to help, or press-ganged by a warden or controller you are covered. Practices are also covered, third party automatically and personal cover, provided the local police have been informed of the practice beforehand (we normally call the police on the day with details of location and approximate numbers).

Third party liability is provided through the BCRC's affiliation to the Mountain Rescue Council and is at present £3m. This covers rescuers in the event of a claim by a third party and includes medical decisions taken by an individual, except in the case of a professional medic - such as a doctor, nurse or paramedic - who would be expected to carry their own third party cover *. The exemption does not include trained first aiders the criteria is whether or not the person is a professional so the holder of a first aid certificate need not fear, but please don't take the opportunity to play.

The personal accident cover is via the police authority for the area in which the rescue team operates. Arrangements are in place for 'cross border' callouts. At present, the p.a. cover is for £115,000 for death with a sliding scale for injuries.

Grants are the second important area that concerns the BCRC. Again, via the Mountain Rescue link we have access to equipment grants and training grants. In the last year the SWCRO has received BCRC related grants for 3 Little Dragons, 200m 11mm Edelrid rope, £200 towards Rescon96, held at Penwyllt and £330 towards the new First Aid manual and video. Teams or organisations make an application for equipment or training grants, which are considered by the council in the event of limited funds or passed direct to the MRC (equipment grants).

I believe that the British Cave Rescue Council is vital to all cave rescue teams. Personal contacts, exchange of experiences, access to grants and equipment, the fund of technical knowledge, the backing of a national organisation to aid and advise on 'local' difficulties and the opportunity to have a opinion nationally heard are but a few of the benefits.

The £10 a year membership fee is very well spent.

Brian Jopling,

Equipment officer, British Cave Rescue Council.

* Recently the question of cover for professional medical people has been raised. It seems that some professionals may not have cover beyond their place of work or specifically designated situations and this problem is being raised at national level. Please note that those with first aid certificates ARE covered.

A 'VICTIM'S' VIEWPOINT

I have been hauled up and lowered down various pitches, disused mine shafts and pots; pushed through boulder chokes & crawls and carried through adits, rifts, streamways, passages and chambers. I have been carried out of mines and caves by the C.R.O. and West Brecon, Midland, Gloucester, Mendip and Dudley Rescue Teams. No, I am not a sloppy caver nor accident-prone, but a regular victim on rescue practices.

It's valuable experience and one I recommend every caver tries at least once. You gain intimate knowledge of the different types of stretchers - which ones make you feel vulnerable and which safe (in my opinion the Cocoon is unequalled!). You learn at what point bits of dirt falling in your face becomes more irritating than wearing goggles which reduce visibility. But mostly you learn that, even when the victim is packaged in the stretcher, they remain a person and not a parcel to be stepped over, ignored or parked under drips in draughts during change-overs. In short, you become more aware and sympathetic to someone who is in the stretcher for real.

There can be worrying moments, such as hanging in mid-air in a creaking Neil Rob. looking into the black void deep below wondering why there's a delay. Or annoying moments when the rope gets caught on a haul and you're left hanging with cold drips going straight down the back of your neck. But the victim can also cause alarm - such as the time I was warm and comfortable and decided to take a nap. Or another time I got so cold after a wet trip in, that the Little Dragon was required.

But in the end, someone else is doing the work and you get carried to the surface - which beats walking, climbing and crawling !

Hazel Forbes

Note that the term 'Victim' is sometimes used only in a Rescue practice. In a real Rescue situation, the term 'Casualty' is used, or alternatively the Casualty is referred to by name.

Ed

Forthcoming Attractions

WBCRT practices together regularly in order to maintain a state of readiness and to provide the opportunity for us all to keep our skills and techniques current. What follows are the dates so far organised. A few weeks before each exercise we circulate details to the clubs with an HQ in South Wales, Dragon Caving Gear, The Copper Beech and the Cosy Cafe in Hirwaun.

Saturday June 28th. A combined exercise with Gwent CRT. The venue is Ogof Draenen. A serious incident in this cave will almost certainly involve both the South Wales teams and possible the Gloucester Cave Rescue Group.

The idea is for WBCRT members to familiarise themselves with the cave and the likely problems that arise during an evacuation. We will be guided by members of the Gwent team. More details of this event will be forthcoming.

Collaborating with the Cave Diving Group (CDG). We are at an early stage of organising a combined event with the Welsh section of the CDG. Such an exercise would test our ability to work together to manage a diving incident.

Brian Powell

The Byfre Dam

For a great many years, the Byfre Dam has been made available and it has been brought into use on occasion. This dam has been used to reduce the level of water flowing into Ogof Ffynnon Ddu at the Byfre sink in a rescue situation, the intention being to assist in the rescue or search for parties in the vicinity of the streamway.

For some time now, it has been apparent that the condition of the existing structure that supports the rescue dam has been deteriorating. Having now inspected the site, it is the considered opinion of those with expertise in the area of civil engineering that the dam is no longer safe to continue using.

The result of this inspection is that use of the Byfre Dam will be discontinued for Rescue purposes, as repair work would be prohibitively expensive and even then of uncertain effectiveness.

GE

Frequently Asked Questions about WBCRT

There seems to be a number of misapprehensions about WBCRT - how you join and how it's run etc. In the spirit of the INTERNET, here are some FAQs about your team.

1) How can I become a member of WBCRT ?

There is no formal membership process. Any caving club or individual caver active in South Wales can join. The only pre-requisite is an interest in Cave Rescue and the desire to get involved.

2) So, how is the team managed ?

There's an Executive, elected at the Annual General Meeting of the team. The only permanent members of the Executive are the Team Wardens. They are the first line of contact with the police and are responsible for organising the first stages of a rescue. Clubs based in Wales are entitled to send a representative to WBCRT meetings.

All the other Executive posts are filled at the AGM in June each year. WBCRT is a registered charity.

3) What does the Executive do ?

It is responsible for a number of things :

- o Fund raising
- o Organising practices
- o Maintaining the rescue stores and the Landrover ambulance
- o Keeping cavers aware of the rescue 'scene'

In addition we send four representatives to the South Wales Cave Rescue Organisation (SWCRO).

4) What about practising together ?

WBCRT has full day exercises every 3-4 months, once a year we combine with the Gwent team. In addition mid-week practices lasting a couple of hours have taken place on most Wednesday evenings. Details are displayed at Dragon Caving Gear, The Copper Beech and the Cosy Cafe in Hirwaun. Also clubs with an HQ in the area get details.

5) I've got no rescue skills.

Then come to the practices and workshops. At these you have the chance to learn about all aspects of rescue: controlling, communications, pitch hauling, navigation, off-road driving, first aid. Everyone is welcome and there's the chance to meet other cavers and share a drink afterwards.

6) Will there be tests and exams ?

Only the Advanced First Aid course is tested, it's a condition of doing the course. WBCRT does not test anybody. We are developing a Training Checklist to enable members to record their skills and note when refreshers are needed.

7) How can my club help WBCRT ?

Ensure that it sends a rep. to WBCRT meetings. Does the Committee include a Rescue Officer? If not appoint one.

Make sure the rep. or Officer knows what's going on and tells the members about events etc. Respond to calls for help or fund-raising.

8) Who makes up the current Executive

The WBCRT executive consists of 9 Wardens, 7 Officers, 4 Mid Wales Wardens, 2 Ordinary Members plus representatives from member clubs as follows :

Wardens

Kevin Davies Chairman
John Lister (Also Mid Wales Warden)

Gary Evans
Annie Foster
Bob Saunders Secretary
Pete Dobson First Aid Officer

Bob Radcliffe
Sue Mabbett
Brian Bowell Training Officer

Other

Pat Hall Treasurer
Brian Jopling Equipment Officer
Brian Clipstone Communications Officer
Bob Hall SWCC Rescue Officer
Toby Dryden Ordinary Member
Rhys Williams Ordinary Member
Hazel Forbes Mid Wales Warden
Mark Stanton Mid Wales Warden
Clive Edwards Mid Wales Warden

Brian Bowell

Archives Feature

We are planning to include in each Newsletter an archive feature which will concentrate on a particular rescue related incident each time. Bob Hall will be co-ordinating these articles and would like to appeal for help in putting together the relevant information to allow him to write each feature. The incidents that Bob would like to cover (although there are certainly more) are :

Bridge Cave Incident : August 1952
David Jenkins - Waterfall Series : April 1958
Coed Y Mwstwr fatality : June 1961
Llethrid Rescue : Winter 1964
Little Neath flooding : February 1967
Paul Esser : February 1971
Lost Cavers - Agen Allwedd : June 1970
Bill Little : January 1972
Roger Solari : June 1974
Gough and Fitton : December 1979
Tim Flanagan : January 1981
Drownings in Porth Yr Ogof

After this lot we are more or less into living memory, although by the time we have gone through them we'll be in the next millennium as like as not!

Bob would like help with some idea of who was involved, references to written reports, names of people to talk to etc. So, if you can help at all, or would like to take any of these on yourself, please get in touch with Bob.

GE & Bob Hall

Contributions or Queries

If you have any contribution for this Newsletter or any queries regarding its content, contact the Editor (Edition 2 onwards), Tony Baker at:
26 Constable Way, College Green, Camberley,
Surrey, GU47 0FE - Tel. 01276 609162

If you have any question, queries or suggestions regarding Rescue related matters generally, either : contact any member of the WBCRT Executive, or contact Gary Evans at :
Poplar Court, Station Road, Caehopkin, Abercraf
Swansea, SA9 1TP - Tel. 01639 730806

Next 4 issues - July, 1997
October, 1997
January, 1998
April, 1998

Our 1st Rescue : Bill Little & Lewis Railton 1951.

Interestingly this incident was one of the most serious ever to have occurred in our region. As with the other incidents to be described in this series it shaped the future of 'Rescue' and became part of our 'folklore'. This short account has been taken from the detailed reports published in the SWCC circular of November 1951 and the SWCC 50th Anniversary Publication (Newsletter No.118).

Bill and Lewis entered OFD 1 at 10.45 on Sat. 25th August 1951 intending to spend some ten hours in the cave on a surveying trip. Up to that morning the August rainfall in the area had been in excess of five inches. During that Saturday 1.36" fell with more than an inch more in the next two days.

The two cavers spent most of the day in the dry passages of the Rawl series and only discovered their way out blocked at 19.30 that evening. They spent the next 50 hours or so trapped in the cave. They were able to keep themselves alive thanks to the stocks of food, candles and carbide that they had brought with them or were kept in the cave. The remains of their camp can still be picked out near the start of Shale Crawl.

The flooding caused considerable alarm on the surface, not least because it was suspected that another party of cavers was in the Waterfall Series. The rescue effort concentrated on attempts to dam and divert the Byfre stream. To this end miners, soldiers and mountain rescue personnel were employed working at the Byfre, particularly in the small hours of on Monday 27th when the rain was 'appalling'. Consideration was given to using pit-prop stemples to bridge the streamway but this was not done.

Mercifully the rain abated after 9 am on the Monday morning and twelve hours later the trapped cavers were on their way out under their own steam and still in good physical condition.

This incident was significant in many ways. It led to the development of the Escape Route and it shaped rescue thinking for many years. It had not been anticipated and all the training effort up to that point had been directed towards the evacuation of a casualty. Perhaps there are lessons yet to be learnt from this.

Bob Hall