

Mountain Rescue in the Gorge

These notes follow a SWOAPG workshop with Central Beacons MR at their Dowlais Base, run by deputy team leaders Dave Cross and Huw Jones in May 2016.

The principles here are all discussed in a gorge environment, but are equally as relevant to any outdoor emergency situation.

Background to MR

There are four Mountain Rescue teams in South Wales; Brecon, Longtown (Black Mountains), Central and Western, as well as a Cave Rescue team covering the whole of South and Mid Wales.

When called out a team may respond on their own, with a neighbouring team or with members of all teams in the region.

How to Call out Mountain Rescue

Dial **999** or **112** and ask for **POLICE**, then **Mountain Rescue**.

Try to call even if you have no signal, as **emergency calls** can be made on **any network**.

You should be transferred to Powys Police, but if calling from a mobile phone you may end up with South Wales or Gwent, depending on how the network connects you. The operator may not have any knowledge of the area you are in, so be prepared to explain things well, including spellings. They will then contact the MR team via their pagers, the team will muster, collect equipment and travel to the scene.

If you ask for an ambulance instead, you will not get MR, and you will delay getting the appropriate support. The police will be able to coordinate MR as well as ambulances and any air or other support you may require.

What information to give

The more information you can give to the operator, the better informed your incoming rescue team will be.

- **Where you are.** Grid Reference, fall names, marker post number.
- **Side of river.** Left or Right?
- **Who you are.** Gorge walking group
- **What has happened.** Nature of incident, number of people involved, suspected injuries, size of your group
- **Weather Conditions.** Including water levels
- **Your phone number.** So that you can be contacted for addition information.

You can also advise on the **best access route** in to the casualty or a rendezvous point to guide the team in. We know the gorge better than anyone, any useful information we pass across all adds up to a more efficient rescue. **Stay with your comms** so that MR can ring you back if required. The more information you can give them the better.

Casualty care whilst waiting for MR

MR are volunteers that respond to a police request for assistance, their response time to you varies due to team member commitments like work. Weekend and evening responses are likely to be faster than mid-week. You can expect to manage your casualty for around 1 hour following your emergency call before a MR team arrive in the gorge.

You must make a decision based on your **qualification and training** on whether to **move a casualty**, but it is likely that they will need to be in a safe area where they can be treated.

If the injury occurs in the water and you have to choose a side to move the casualty to, think which one will be safest to wait and easiest to evacuate from.

- Basic **1st aid** and **prevent deterioration**.
- Make casualty as **comfortable** as possible.
- Keep them **warm**. A Kisu, insulation from ground, dry hats, gloves and layers will all help to achieve this.

You will also be responsible for the rest of the group, keep them warm and safe whilst managing the casualty. Hypothermia makes both 1st aid and rescue more difficult.

When MR arrive

MR will take the lead on the rescue. You and your group could prove a valuable asset to supporting MR and rescuing the casualty, or you may be moved away to make the scene more manageable. MR are more likely to **ask for our help** now than they have before.

MR will arrive with medical kit, 1st aid as standard, or if you have given the **right information** to the police, the most **appropriate kit** to deal with your casualty. They will not arrive in SRT kit unless you describe a situation where they would need to do so.

MR will make decisions on moving the casualty and evacuation, either on land or by air. There are many factors effecting this decision.

When a helicopter arrives

If a helicopter is called to the incident then the first sign will be it buzzing around the area, evaluating and planning escape routes etc.

As the helicopter may arrive before the MR team (ETA 15-20mins), you must be ready to prepare for their arrival.

- **Be visible.** Use a bright Kisu or stand in a Y shape to say you need assistance.
- **Get group out of the area.** For their safety.
- **Pack away all kit.** Every must be secure or poses a danger to you and the aircraft.
- **Sit on bags.** It's going to be rough!

The **down draft** from the new helicopters is much greater than the old Sea Kings, in the gorge that means **debris** from the trees will be significant. All equipment should be secured, in a bag or on a person.

The helicopter may decide that it's safer to drop the Winchman away from the site and they will walk to you.

On arrival the **Winchman will take control of the scene.** This may involve just clipping the stretcher to the line and going.

As the new aircraft are also smaller, there is less room for passengers to accompany the casualty. You can ask the Winchman which **hospital** they are heading to, but if in doubt you can call the police (101) who are coordinating the incident.

There are places in the gorge where the new helicopter has landed and places where it has winched. Reports so far are that it is just as functional as the Sea Kings, with a faster response time.