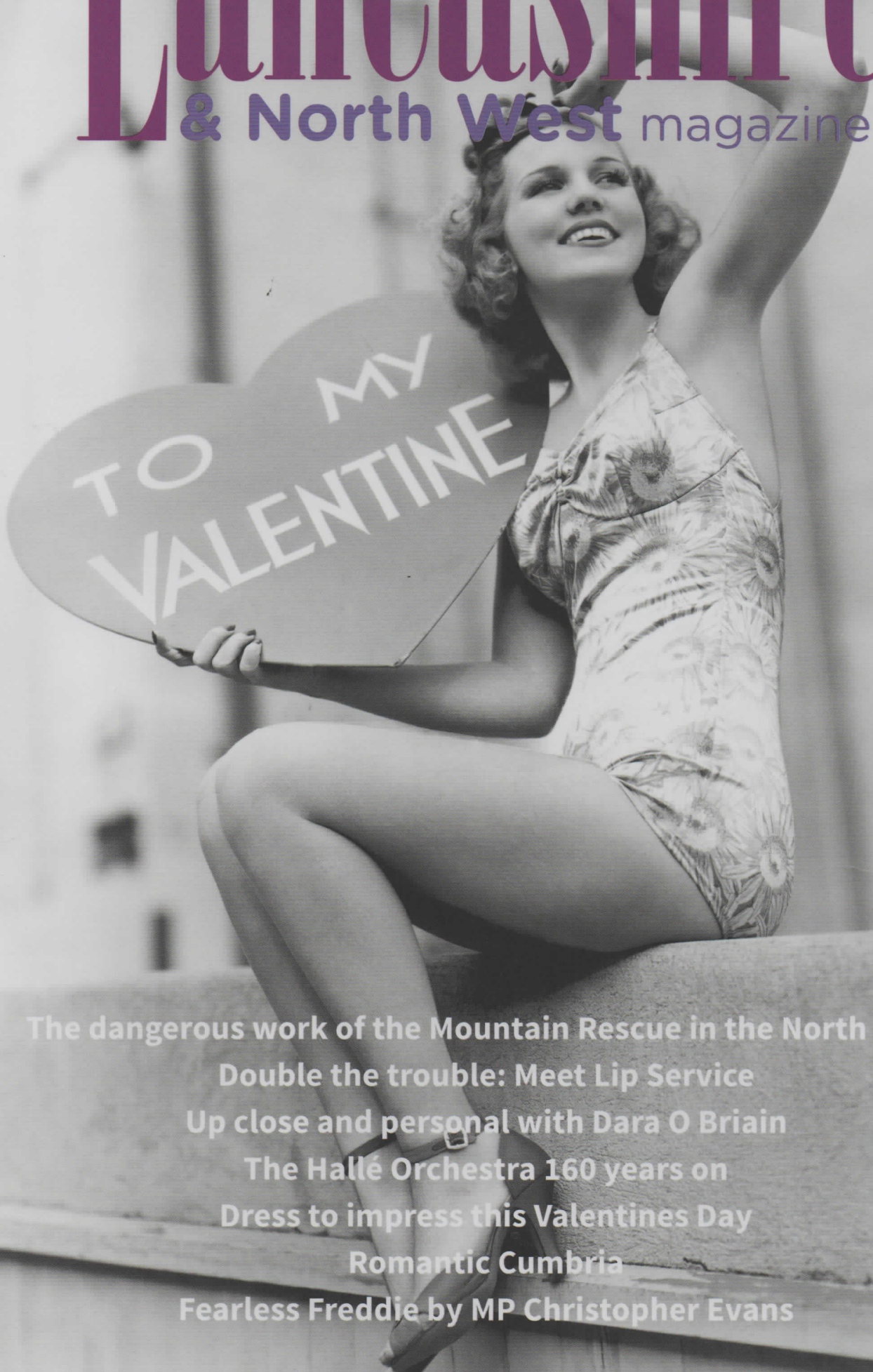


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# Lancashire

## & North West magazine



The dangerous work of the Mountain Rescue in the North West

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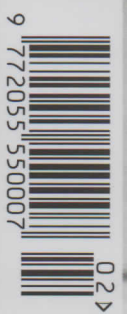
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# Mountain Rescue in the North West (What you probably didn't know)



By Andrew Harris

**ABOVE: Mountain Rescue Teams achieve results through teamwork. RIGHT: Teams will go to any lengths to rescue . . .**

Mountain Rescue Teams are amazing. They are always there when needed yet are practically invisible the rest of the time. They have equipment that the other emergency services might envy but rely on donations and grants instead of government funding. They are experts in navigation, off-road driving, casualty care, communications and the technicalities of rescue yet they are all unpaid volunteers.

The term 'Mountain Rescue' understates the service these teams provide. They do find and rescue people from mountains but their experience, skills and role are so much wider. They are more like a land-based equivalent of search and rescue helicopters and lifeboats at sea. The national organisation is Mountain Rescue England & Wales but mountain rescue teams are all independent charities grouped together in nine associations for distinct areas like the

Mid-Pennine uplands and the Lake District. See the panel for the 14 teams which serve our region.

Mountain Rescue Teams meet many needs such as –

- Classic rescues of people caught out on mountains or uplands by weather, fatigue, illness or accidents.
- Searches for missing people
- Supporting other emergency services at difficult-to-access locations
- Evacuating people threatened by flood waters
- Encouraging safety through education
- Training their teams and others in land-based search and rescue.

The latest annual review of Mountain Rescue England & Wales explains "Every walker with reasonable experience of the fells or uplands knows how dangerous it can be out there. The weather can change in minutes

transforming a mild afternoon into a foggy, cold and treacherous trap for the unwary. Rescue, if needed, may involve another amazing resource -the mountain rescue dogs. These dogs are trained over two or more years with support and advice given to handlers. The aim is to have the air-scenting search dogs operating up to 100 metres away from the rescue team. Handler Chris Francis of the Keswick Mountain Rescue Team explains "The dogs are trained to use their sense of smell to find humans but not to distinguish between different humans. It tends to work well because when we go out with the dogs there is nobody else about apart from the people we are trying to find." Your rescuer may have four legs instead of two! This vital support service is provided in Cumbria by the Lake District Mountain Rescue Search Dogs Association.

Outside Cumbria Peter Durst was instrumental in founding the Search

and Rescue Dogs Association which provides mountain rescue teams in the rest of England & Wales with this support. As Peter is a leading light in mountain rescue and President of the Rossendale & Pendle Mountain Rescue Team your columnist went to meet him and his colleagues to learn more about this team which is a pioneering unit and a good example of how such teams operate.

After a tragedy in 1962, when two boys died, separate search and rescue teams were launched in Preston and what is now South Ribble. By 1970 much muddle had been resolved and the Rossendale & Pendle Team was launched. It now has 42 unpaid volunteers which includes their leadership, full team members, operational and other trainees plus the support team. Everyone has a role to play such as specialist technical rope rescuers, casualty carers and swift water rescue technicians which enable the team to provide a professional and diverse range of skills in any situation. To achieve and maintain this level of expertise the team trains at least one night a week to cover every discipline that may be needed as well as real time outdoor exercises most weekends.

The team never know in advance what a call-out can involve. Typical challenges are walkers lost on moorland, biker injuries and missing person searches. The team also provide technical rope rescue, ambulance assists and safety cover for events such as fell races. All this needs specialist equipment which is unique to mountain rescue. The vehicles are designed to access difficult terrain with a full range of kit and as much personal equipment as possible. This enables the team to get closer than the other emergency services to the casualty and it is often this capability which causes partner services like ambulances to ask for assistance. As many rescues involve awkward locations the team use kit unique to mountain rescue – like the Multi-Integrated Body Splint stretcher which is lightweight and designed for use in confined spaces. The team are proud that the combination of their skills, vehicles and specialist kit enable them to provide the best possible search and rescue service in difficult circumstances.

The Rossendale & Pendle Team were called out no fewer than 65 times in the last 12 months. Just three examples of call-outs illustrate the diversity involved



**Mountain Rescue Teams in the North West**

- |                             |                                |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>Bolton</b>               | <b>Kirby Stephen</b>           |
| <b>Bowland Pennine</b>      | <b>Langdale/Ambleside</b>      |
| <b>Cockermouth</b>          | <b>Oldham</b>                  |
| <b>Coniston</b>             | <b>Patterdale</b>              |
| <b>Duddon &amp; Furness</b> | <b>Penrith</b>                 |
| <b>Kendal</b>               | <b>Rossendale &amp; Pendle</b> |
| <b>Keswick</b>              | <b>Wasdale</b>                 |



• The team was called out to find and rescue a biker who was thought to have a serious leg injury. The full team was deployed in response vehicles. On arrival at the likely location a search was launched assisted by some fell runners and mountain bikers. When the casualty was found the team discovered that he did not have a leg injury but was having a very serious cardiac event. Team members deployed a stretch and other equipment but it became clear that the casualty was so unwell that he couldn't be carried off the moor by ambulance. Help was summoned and the casualty was air-lifted to a specialist cardiology hospital and underwent life-saving surgery. As a result of the rescue and treatment this biker is alive and well.

• A very different call-out was to a dog-walker whose pet was trapped down a shear rock face. A rope rescue was needed. Some teams use a single line approach to rope rescues but the Rossendale & Pendle Team use a live and separate safety line as the latter is a back-up for the rescued and rescuer. This provides great advantages when a rescue is undertaken jointly with the fire service as both use the same technique enabling them to work together seamlessly.

• Other call-outs have involved joint working with the police when poorly or vulnerable people go missing. Searches are usually in moorland or woods but have also been in urban areas. The team includes 'Search Managers' who are trained to deliver search strategies and work closely with their counterparts in the police service.

Mountain rescue teams in England and Wales responded to 1,812 call-outs in 2016 – an increase of about 10% nationwide





**TOP OPPOSITE: . . . even a dog! BOTTOM OPPOSITE: Rescue teams use robust 4 X 4 vehicle like this to reach the search area. TOP LEFT: The rescue team train intensively although real casualties don't find it so amusing! TOP RIGHT: Peter Durst now relaxes after many years of distinguished service in mountain rescue. ABOVE: A team may have to carry a casualty a long way to a place suitable for transfer to an air ambulance.**

except the Lake District which saw a reduction of 20%. The statistics are confusing as people are more active but many are staying safer. Yet their national association says "Nearly 500 incidents in 2016 were of the type that lend themselves to being more easily avoided than more serious medical issues or accidents. Reasons such as getting lost, benighted or crag-fast (stuck on a rock), succumbing to minor slips and trips or for some reason being unable to continue all contribute to this figure."

Excepting accidents and medical crises, safety on the

mountains, uplands or exposed countryside can easily be improved. Simple precautions help greatly. Please see the panel for a summary of them. For detailed safety advice visit [www.mountain.rescue.org.uk](http://www.mountain.rescue.org.uk)

Mountain Rescue has nothing like the profile of major national charities like the Royal National Lifeboat Institution yet, like them, the service is free but the cost is comparatively modest. Despite this donations are desperately needed and every contribution makes a big impact. The team nearest to you is listed in our other panel so to offer support 'google' on



the web by using their name followed by MRT.

The purpose and role of mountain rescue teams would be better understood if they were called search & rescue teams but however they are labelled the dedication, skills and equipment of such teams are invaluable and often fill gaps in what other emergency services can provide. They are the least visible emergency service but for many they can make the difference between life and death.

**Andrew Harris** – [www.andreweharris.co.uk](http://www.andreweharris.co.uk) - gratefully acknowledges the help provided by President Peter Durst, Team Leader Peter Goble and Press Officer Andy Bradshaw of the Rossendale & Pendle Mountain Rescue Team in the preparation of this article. All the pictures except that of Peter Durst are courtesy of the Team.



#### SAFETY TIPS FOR EXPOSED AND/OR REMOTE LOCATIONS

- Tell someone where you're going and when you expect to return
- Wear clothing & footwear suitable for hard use and colder weather
- Plan your route and always know where you are by using GPS or a smartphone backed up by a map and compass. Also use the 'os locate' app which is free
- Ensure you can communicate. If no signal for your mobile use mini-flares`
- Take water so you don't dehydrate and snacks in case you are much delayed
- Know your limitations! You may walk to get fit but you must be fit to walk

For more detailed advice visit [www.mountain.rescue.org.uk](http://www.mountain.rescue.org.uk)

**TOP LEFT:** The casualty is only minutes from treatment in hospital when transferred to the air ambulance by the rescue team. **LEFT:** Mission accomplished. **BELOW:** . . . but it can be a long walk home for the rescue team.

