



Ogwen Valley Mountain Rescue CIO

Newsletter August 2021



Team Update - Tim Bird

I am sure you will all have noticed an increase in activities in your local areas as lockdown conditions slowly ease and the summer season and better weather is upon us. Mountain Rescue is no different and the Team has been busy with regular callouts and training. A major difference between this time last year is that many of us are now vaccinated. Unfortunately the emerging Covid variants still require a cautious approach to work, life and rescue operations.

I am pleased to tell you that OVMRO continues to thrive during these difficult times with excellent new recruits and experienced Team Members coping well with the increase in callouts. Of course none of these rescues would be possible without all the hard work put into supporting the Team with Training, Equipment, Governance and sound Finances. Our thanks continues to go to 333 members for continuing to support the Team. Your contributions, large or small or in-kind, all help OVMRO to continue its important rescue operations. Of note is the formation of a new OVMRO Fundraising Group which I hope you can continue to support and follow. Please enjoy the mountains safely and best wishes for a Covid secure 2021.

THE CHALLENGES OF COVID FOR A MOUNTAIN RESCUE TEAM (Treasurer - Cally Palmer)

It seems hard to comprehend that since being appointed as the Treasurer for OVMRO last year we have all been gripped by the pandemic and I have still not yet been able to meet everyone in the team, with lockdowns and restrictions limiting social contact and Trustee and Committee meetings all being conducted online. This inevitably brings further challenges as rural broadband provision in many parts of North Wales is still woefully inadequate to facilitate online meetings!

Financially it has been a particularly challenging time. Like many charities we are now seeing a decline in donations and minimal interest rates on investments whilst procurement costs for essential equipment supplies have risen steeply over the last 12 months and lead times have lengthened considerably in some cases due to supply issues. Additionally, PPE costs and Covid protocols are now an important consideration to enable the team to continue to operate safely.

The ability of the whole team to create a comprehensive and cohesive strategy to address all the challenges with regards to training, recruitment, health and safety, equipment and maintenance was (and remains) paramount. Managing and recognising different perspectives, expectations and frustrations has enabled OVMRO to respond quickly and adapt to changing guidelines and parameters as the nation strives to overcome the unprecedented challenges of the pandemic and ultimately begin to return to some semblance of normality.

Covid-19 has impacted everyone. Many members of our team are employed in front-line services such as the NHS and the Police and had to cope with increased work pressures and stresses whilst others may have struggled with redundancy, adapting businesses, working from home and self-isolation. Mandated social distancing has also limited support and contact with family, friends, colleagues and 333 supporters.

In the words of some of the team.....

CHAIRMAN (Tim Bird)

Like many organisations, the pandemic has created many unexpected challenges to the Team and its primary mission "To search for, rescue and assist people in difficulty in the mountains and inhospitable environments". Although I have 20 years Mountain Rescue experience, my tenure as the Chairman started in March 2020 with the unprecedented events of the first Covid-19 National lock-down. Although we are all now familiar with words like; Social Distancing, Zoom meetings, Face Masks, PPE, Lateral Flow Tests, Self-Isolating, Quarantine, Key Workers, Shielding, Working From Home etc. these were new to all of us back then. OVMRO is one of the busiest front-line Mountain Rescue Teams in Wales and the UK. Its main asset is its people, not just the operational Team Members but its Support Members and Supporters. The Team's key operations rely on what I describe as the four pillars: Training, Equipment, Finance and Good Governance. Without these vital supporting foundations the Team Members (Operational and Support) can not safely complete their mission.

So what has been the greatest challenge we faced during the Pandemic? Developing new Covid-safe operating procedures, not being able to meet in person to run essential training events, the rapid increase in callouts following the release from lock-downs with more people 'staycating' in the mountains, the increased potential for mental health issues for our Team Members and their families, the decrease in charitable giving across all sectors as people tighten their belts during the pandemic, the difficulty running Training, Committee and Trustees' meetings online and not in person. Of course the list is endless, on reflection it is probably not one issue that has been the greatest challenge but adapting to all the changes. However, if I had to choose one pandemic challenge it would be overcoming the human factors, missing the face-to-face and camaraderie which comes as being part of a team.

TRAINING OFFICER (Kim Burnham)

Well, organising training in non-Covid times is like herding cats, during Covid it's like herding cats blindfolded... The biggest issue has been the unpredictability of lockdown and when and how much lockdown will be relaxed or re-imposed, and having to reorganise and re-reorganise dates, trainers, and venues. Now that things seem to be relaxing more, and also seem to be a bit more stable, it's trying to fit in all the backdated training, amongst the increasing number of callouts.

The newsletter relies on contributions from the membership and supporters.

Please think about writing an article or providing a picture.

Please email heather.beale@ogwen-rescue.org.uk if you would prefer an electronic version of the newsletter in the next copy

Russ Hore - russ.hore@ogwen-rescue.org.uk - Editor

CASUALTY CARE OFFICER (Jamie Barclay)
Adapting our training and rescue practices to be as Covid-safe as possible. We switched much of our training to online delivery, we have created processes to keep casualties and team members safe during rescues and implemented careful decontamination systems for people and equipment at the end of training / rescues.

TRANSPORT OFFICER (Brian Robbins)
Greatest challenge to me personally has been the need to be separated from the team due to being in an at-risk category. Being unable to attend base and meet up with team members has made it a difficult 12+ months as vehicles need hands-on attention, however luckily I have an excellent deputy (Chris Thomas) who has carried out the work in my absence. With the usage of the vehicles being reduced due to less callouts, batteries have been going flat and volunteers have taken the vehicles for a run to keep them operational and ready for use. Mentally I am lucky that my wife Hazel has been working from home, so looking after her need for frequent mugs of coffee, food etc has kept me busy and sane! Communication with team members on all things transport has been excellent and any problems have been promptly relayed to me and my post on the committee has been as normal due to virtual team meetings via the laptop.

EQUIPMENT MANAGER (Sharon Parry)
Initially, trying to find out what was required to protect our Team Members against a new disease, considering the different advice and situation updating all the time. Challenges with sourcing the kit and its availability due to demand without encroaching on the statutory services and their priority to have such. Choosing the right kit first time became problematic due to the fast pace of advice that seemed to be changing constantly, and as things changed updating our Covid kits as new information came available.

COMMS OFFICER (Paul Smith)
I think I've had a slightly exceptional Covid, in that I have been working all the way through. Working in the forest, the recommended separation is 2 tree lengths so 2m is kind of moot although it has stopped us getting cake on Fridays, as the cafes were closed! As Comms Officer there has been no real impact as all the video conferencing for team meetings is computer based which, luckily, falls to the IT group!

IT OFFICER (Joe Begley)
The main issue from the IT side has been getting everybody up to speed with video conferencing particularly people who don't get involved with IT related things. Socially distanced meetings via the webcam are much harder than face-to-face particularly when IT issues are involved. The pressure/demand to keep the IT systems working efficiently has definitely increased during these lockdown periods and I think the IT group has handled this well.

TEAM MEMBER (Dave Brown)
For me I think it's about missing the camaraderie with team members. Also the old adage of 'train hard fight easy'. Due to Covid we have, as many others, resorted to online training. While this has helped address certain aspects, to be slick in a call out and work as a team we need to train as a team, be this from carrying a stretcher (an overlooked skill) to a technical rope set up. We still "fresh eyes" equipment and each other, a way to double check everything is OK. This is a great protocol to have in place.

TEAM MEMBER (John Heaton)
When considering the last 15 months, one of the greatest challenges was the period when we could not train together, the training team did an excellent job of trying to compensate via internet meetings but our work and skill sets require physical practice to keep at the top of our game. I am one of the oldest members still on the hill and personally I am still not back at full hill fitness yet either. In addition we have had to pick up additional tasks for example the decontamination of the whole base, vehicles and equipment every week since March 2020.

TEAM MEMBER (Jed Stone)
The setting up of small dedicated Covid Team to oversee how we responded to the pandemic in all aspects involved, negated the sudden surge of experts on the subject that emerged within the team.

TRAINEES DURING COVID
The biggest challenge of Covid for me was not really knowing how the team operated pre Covid! Having become a trainee shortly before Covid and completed the vast majority of my training and final hill day under Covid conditions I don't really know anything else. The reduced opportunity for an informal natter in the crew room or social in a cafe or elsewhere has meant it has been a little bit harder to get to know people, especially those who have needed to take a step back from operations. (Iona Pawson)

I think for me it was putting faces to names and understanding who everyone was and what they did (lots of middle-aged men in red jackets!!!). Also the lack of a consistent training programme so when we were called out there were lots of things we were initially unsure of the agreed way to do it. We were very grateful for all the training that was facilitated. (Jenny Dart)

For me it was the lack of training, combined with vast fluctuations in callout quantities, which meant we were often on callouts with people we'd never met and learning on the job more than usual. (Robin Woodward)

FUNDRAISING COORDINATOR (Heather Beale)
During the Covid pandemic, our revenue streams have decreased hugely. Three of the "local" fundraising elements which have been affected by this are: Our collecting tins, which are placed in popular locations throughout Snowdonia, have been removed from counters in shops while the venues have been open, but more importantly, for the majority of the past 15 months, the shops have been closed anyway and have therefore provided us with little or no income. We have supporters who participate in sponsored events, either in Snowdonia or around the UK, but these have been postponed or cancelled due to the pandemic restrictions. There have also been less people visiting the area, and therefore there may be an element of "out of sight, out of mind", as well as a rise in visibility of other (equally important) charities, i.e. mental health and NHS charities.

TRUSTEE (Dave Otter)
I think the biggest thing for me as a Trustee has been not being able to visit Oggie base and support the team. My day-to-day role within HR, Safeguarding, Welfare and Learning and Development was, pre-Covid, very face-to-face so in all honesty it feels like I've been able to add very little value in the first 12 months of my role. That said I came very close to meeting some of the team very recently when a friend and I got a little stuck on the Knights Move on Grooved Arete! As I was belaying that particular pitch I had a great view of Oggie base for 30 mins as my mate worked out what to do and I wondered whether I should be calling for some help! In the end we were fine and I was spared the embarrassment of being rescued by the team.

TEAM MEMBER / TRUSTEE / PRESS OFFICER (Chris Lloyd)
The biggest hit has been the lack of face-to-face contact and working with other team members. At the centre of OVMRO there is a core of team members. These members attend above average incidents, training and the running of OVMRO. These different characters with different skills from different backgrounds are bonded by team spirit, camaraderie and a sense of purpose. This cannot be replicated by a cold, unoccupied Oggi Base and communications via a computer screen. I am pleased to see Bryn Poeth (aka Oggi Base), the home of Ogwen Valley Mountain Rescue Organisation, alive once more with active training, rescues and meetings. The atmosphere and team spirit are back.

I would like to echo the words of Chris Lloyd. There are many people working extremely hard both on the front line and in the background to enable the team to remain fully responsive and resilient – safeguarding the health and welfare of our team members and casualties; planning essential training whilst adhering to strict protocols; maintaining our base, equipment and vehicles with a reduced core of members; fulfilling shop orders and responding to supporters and donors during lockdown; managing the finances and governance of the charity etc.

In summary, OVMRO has been able to remain fully operational throughout the entire pandemic due to the dedication, commitment, teamwork, experience and professionalism of all our members. As restrictions are easing it is good to see people once again being able to enjoy the mountains of Snowdonia. This will inevitably result in an increasing number of callouts requiring the support and expertise of our members and we remain fully committed to our mission of providing assistance when required and without compromise.

Adfer Ogwen/ Operation Clearwater 7th. August 2021 (Chris Lloyd)

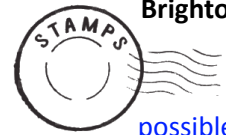
On Saturday 7th. August, OVMRO members will be removing various detritus from the bed of Llyn Ogwen. Members trained in Swift Water Rescue will be using new inflatable rescue rafts (funded from a donation in memory of Alun Owen by Bethesda Rugby Club) to search and recover various items from the bed of Llyn Ogwen. As the average depth is 2.00m (6ft.) and the deepest parts 3.50m (12ft.), it is hoped that much of the detritus can be reached by team members in dry suits with litter picking tongs. Most of the detritus is on the South side, being adjacent to the A5. This includes cans, bottles, cats’ eyes, road signs, vehicle parts and more recently, road cones. The North side is less polluted but probably includes ordnance from the Second World War.

Snowdonia Society members regularly litter pick the shores of Llyn Ogwen and will join us on the day.

A team Land Rover will be sited by the Idwal Visitor Centre with its event gazebo, to attract the attention of passing visitors and walkers. It is hoped that 333 members will help with fundraising at this site and by carrying collection boxes along the A5 as the flotilla passes.

The event “ticks” numerous boxes including practicing with our new water rescue kit; getting team members physically working together rather than “virtually”; engaging with 333 members once more; acknowledging the Rugby Club’s generous donation; pleasing the owners of the lake, Penrhyn Estate and their estate managers, Carter Jonas; pleasing the Ogwen Fishing Club by removing wader puncturing items; The National Trust who own the surrounding area; The Snowdonia National Park, Gwynedd Highways, who own the road cones; and of course the OVMRO Environment Policy.

For a few years, the numerous envelopes, boxes and other containers filled with used postage stamps have been sold to support smaller MRT's in NWMRA. Please could any stamps be posted directly to **OVMRO Stamps, The Poplars, New Brighton, MOLD Flintshire CH7 6QQ.**



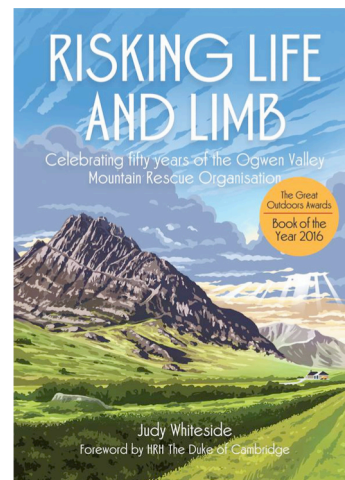
We really appreciate people's efforts to raise money for MR but please could we ask that supporters ensure that the postage is correct, as we regularly have to pay £1.50 excess postage on packages we receive. If possible, any packages being posted should wait until almost 2kg has accumulated, as that would be more cost effective relative to postage costs (at the moment a 2kg parcel is £3.20 but smaller weights may cost over £2.00). It is not unusual to see someone has paid first class postage, over £2 and the stamps are only worth a fraction of that. A donation direct to the team instead of paying postage would be more useful to the team – especially if GiftAided

ANSWERS to November 2021 Quiz! - Cally Palmer OVMRO Treasurer / Trysorydd

Most of the answers to the quiz can be found in “Risking Life & Limb” (page references provided alongside each answer)

This book, which won the TGO Book of the Year Award in 2016, celebrates 50 years of OVMRO and is available to buy from our online shop at <https://shop.ogwen-rescue.org.uk/risking-life-and-limb-p-2807.html>

1. *How many of these mountain rescue teams are based in Wales?*
10
North Wales (6) - Aberdyfi, Aberglaslyn, Llanberis, North East Wales, Ogwen Valley and South Snowdonia, South Wales (4) - Brecon, Central Beacons, Longtown, Western Beacons
2. *How much did it cost for an overnight stay at Idwal Cottage when it first opened as a Youth Hostel?*
1 schilling (page 57)
3. *During the renovations temporary accommodation was provided by a Bedford Signals wagon loaned by North Wales Police. What was the registration number for “Blue Alex”?*
UGY 829F (page 92)
4. *How much did the team’s first Landrover cost?*
£18,000 (page 96)
5. *Who designed the Oggi stretcher which was first marketed in 1989?*
Stuart Dethick (page 125)
6. *In what year did OVMRO first deploy team members to specifically provide flood support and assist emergency services when floodwaters devastated the entire Conwy Valley?*
2005 (page 170)
7. *What is the name of the system which was innovated in 2009 by Russ Hore which is now used by Search and Rescue teams and Police worldwide to assist in locating lost people?*
SARLOC™ Technology (page 223)
8. *Which team member was selected to carry the Olympic torch from Buckingham Palace to Hyde Park Corner during the 2012 Summer Olympics torch relay?*
J Hulse (page 255)
9. *What was the name of Wales’ oldest operational SARDA dog who retired at the age of 14?*
Spin
10. *How many animals in total feature in OVMRO’s 2021 calendar?*
6
February: 2 sheep in Dyffryn Ogwen
May: 1 Carneddau foal
July: 3 Welsh Mountain goats on Y Gribin



New Medical packs for the team.....

Thanks must go to a 333 member (apologies but I do not have a name) who facilitated discussions with ALPKIT resulting in new medical packs designed by Sally Armond. Read more here <https://alpkit.com/blogs/news/custom-mountain-rescue-rucksacks>

The 2022 Oggi Calendar is almost ready to go to press.....watch this space

