

A Mountain Rescue day for young people

by Nick Winder

Over several years now we have developed a Mountain Rescue Team Challenge day, the structure of which is applicable in many environments, which may be of interest to other practitioners. It is run with year 9 up to 6th form (ie 14– 18 year olds), but could be modified to suit younger participants. It provides a good medium for testing teamwork and resourcefulness, and provides excellent opportunity for thorough and valuable feedback and reviewing.

After an initial briefing about the day, each team of youngsters, usually 10-12 in number (who have usually been working together for a while), decide who of their number will attend an hour long training workshop in either Mountain Rescue Skills, First Aid or Navigation. All must attend a workshop and it is recommended that more than one person attends each workshop. The

workshops teach them skills to share with their teams, and to allow them to succeed with the challenge.

WORKSHOP DETAILS

Mountain Rescue Skills – Tips on searching safely in pairs from the Point Last Seen, organising a short search, moving a casualty safely over rough ground, using a group shelter (KISU), building an improvised stretcher with the basic equipment available to them, carrying the stretcher safely, choosing a suitable helicopter landing area and signalling to a helicopter where to land. This workshop can be delivered by someone with knowledge up to Summer ML standard.

First Aid – Basic Danger ABCDE protocols. Putting unconscious casualties into a maintained airway position, identifying and treating fractures and wounds, caring for a casualty. This workshop is ideal for someone who is an experienced first aider with a lot of training under their belt.





Navigation – Grid references, map features, contours, pacing, timing, compass work, hand railing and general map skills. Again this workshop is ideal for someone with Summer ML level knowledge.

Each team is given basic kit to carry in addition to their own personal kit;

Personal kit = Lunch, drink, sufficient clothing for the day, walking boots, waterproof tops and trousers, all in a rucksack.

Group kit = Large (60L) rucksack, group shelter, 25m 8-9mm rope, tough orange survival bag, basic first aid kit, a map for each navigator, a compass, a karrimat and spare warm clothing.

One casualty per team is prepositioned in a location near their reported point last seen. Exactly how close is modified by personal choice and the conditions of the day i.e. poor weather means the casualty is easy to find in a sheltered spot. Each casualty will have some leg injury that requires treatment that prevents walking and some other injury, to keep more than one First Aider busy.

Each team is given written instruction saying

‘A casualty was last seen hill walking/ bird watching/ studying plants etc. at Grid Reference XXXXXX. Your task is to find them, treat any injuries and evacuate them to a suitable place for a helicopter to land/ambulance to drive and pick them up. Your task ends when you signal correctly for a helicopter/ deliver them to the ambulance rendezvous.’

All are made aware of a cut off time at which all must return to base, whether

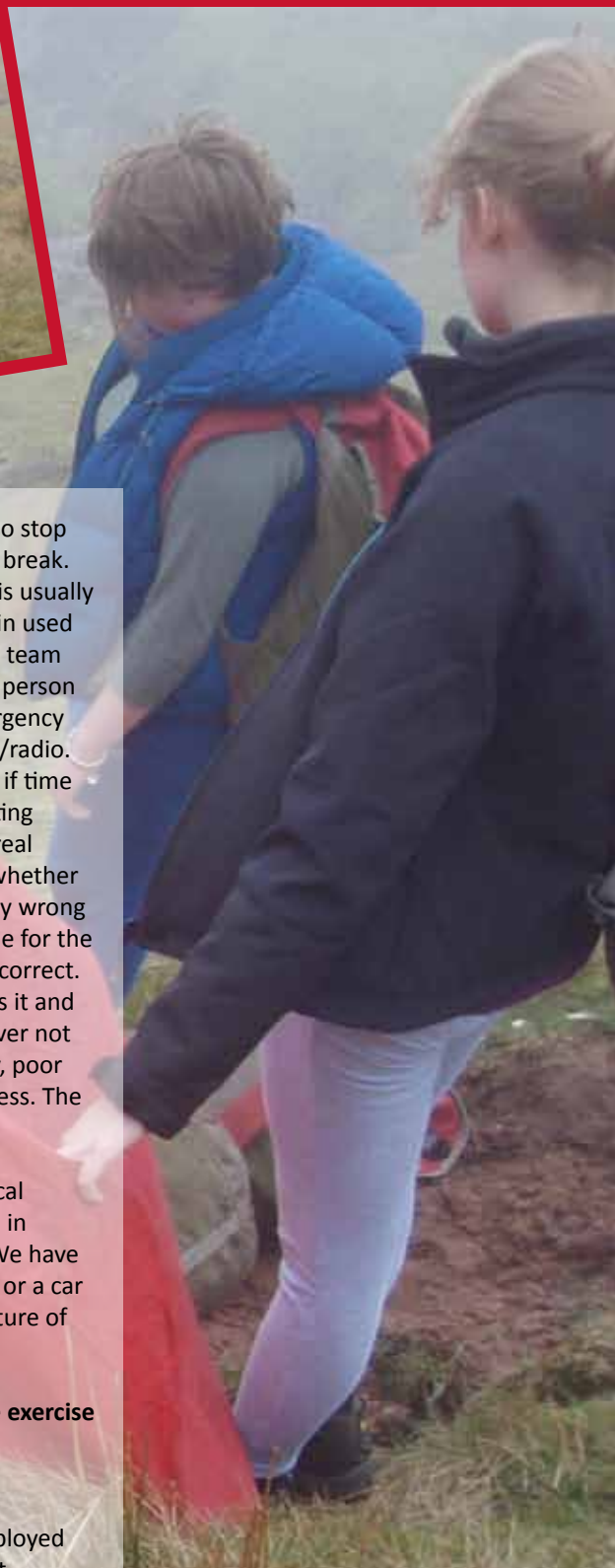
successful or not. They must also stop for a full 20 minutes for a lunch break. The distance they have to walk is usually 2-3 km, depending on the terrain used and conditions on the day. Each team is shadowed by an experienced person with first aid kit and other emergency equipment and a mobile phone/radio. They will usually only intervene if time runs out, the group are attempting something unsafe or there is a real accident. They use judgement whether to help if the navigation is totally wrong after a reasonable period of time for the team to spot the error and self-correct. Each team plans a route, follows it and deals with their casualty. However not all succeed due to, most usually, poor navigation or simply slow progress. The majority succeed.

We have run this exercise on local foothills of the Brecon Beacons, in forests, and in lowland areas. We have operated from the centre itself, or a car park for the minibuses or a mixture of both.

Basic timeline of events for the exercise is:

| | |
|------------|---------------------|
| 0930 | Initial briefing |
| 1000 -1100 | Workshops |
| 1100 | Casualties deployed |
| 1130 | Groups depart |
| 1500 | Cut off time |
| 1630 | Full debrief |

If you try this event, or a version of it, please note it does require slightly more staff than two per group, due to the casualties, who are often the teachers, needing guidance to their locations. However it requires little equipment beyond that which an outdoor centre will already have, and as already stated it provides a great medium for quality reviewing and feedback by the ‘casualties’ and their peers. ■



Author Biog

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Worked in the outdoors for 25 years (where did they go?), for commercial centres and LEA establishments. Through it all I have worked to take youngsters into the wilds and build their awareness and self-confidence. I am also on the exec. of the Bushcraft SIG and have been in Brecon Mountain Rescue Team for 17 years.