

GLOUCESTERSHIRE CAVE RESCUE GROUP



FEBRUARY 2012 NEWSLETTER

Welcome to the first GCRG newsletter of 2012. Hopefully this will prove to be a useful and regular publication to keep you informed of what GCRG has been up to, important notices and details of forthcoming training.

Any newsletter can only be as good as the information printed within it and any articles for inclusion or general comments would be most welcome - contact the Chairman or Secretary.

Important Phone Numbers

GCRG Depot – 01594 827999

Dates for your diary

**Sun March 3rd: Rescue Practise.
Thurs May 3rd: GCRG AGM at the Depot.
Sun June 3rd: Rescue Practise.**

Committee Members

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Forthcoming Training

See the also "Dates for your diary"

March 2012

Following on from the Whittington and Windrush practices, it is proposed that this month the exercise is located in another Cotswold stone mine, site to be confirmed.

DEPOT REFURBISHMENT

GCRG has been located at the Littledean Hill Depot site at the rear of the Cinderford ambulance station since the 1990's when the group was lucky enough to be able to purchase the land and buildings as a result of a considerable amount of work by the committee. This resulted in a grant of £40K being given by the Foundation for Sports & Arts (The Pools Companies). Not only did this grant enable the group to be able to purchase the property and bring its Land Rover and equipment together under one roof but it also left some money over which was used to build a garage and equipment store within an adjacent 3 bay open barn and also allow for the construction within the main building of a control room. This was the start of the refurbishment programme.

Over the years some further work was undertaken to cut through two doorways within the internal walls to give access to the loo and the back room and also to construct a meeting room and a store room, the latter more recently becoming the home for the GSS library.

The most significant work that was undertaken was to remove the asbestos sheeting roof from the main building and replace this with profiled steel sheeting and at the same time clad the exterior of the building. This certainly improved the building's appearance but also served to stop the vast quantities of water that used to come into the building whenever it rained.

It had always been the plan that with this work completed the next stage of the process would be to undertake a major refurbishment of the interior of the building, not least of which would have been to remove the ceiling (if one can call it that) in the main room and replace it with a new one. Various plans were put forward for this work and an offer was even made to undertake the work at a fixed price but for a number of reasons progress just did not happen. It became increasingly embarrassing to even consider taking people who were not members of the group, to the site for meetings. The depot began to take on the appearance of a "dumping ground" for everyone's left over items and it became quite depressing to even have our own committee meetings and training sessions there. Something needed to be done!

The "ball started rolling" when Nicky Bayley joined the GCRG committee. She started to sort out various bits and pieces of what she described as "junk" and as time went on this pile became larger and larger until such time as a "skip" was requested to remove the said pile. As it happened, when the skip was ordered the chap said that would we mind having a very large 10 yard one as he was collecting one from Westbury on Severn and it would save him a journey. We could have it at the same price as a smaller 6 yard one. Not a problem as we did not have that much to go but it would make for an easy way of getting rid of it. The skip was duly delivered and a date set for putting in the rubbish. Well to be honest it was a good job it was the larger one as we had a major clear out and got rid of everything that we did not want (did we need FIVE microwave ovens?) and possibly a few things that we did want but what a difference it made.

With this job out of the way the next job on the list was to replace the roller shutter door on the Land Rover garage. While on site undertaking some other work to level a space to increase our storage area, Paul had a discussion with two chaps who were replacing the doors on the ambulance station garage. Cutting a long story short; having supplied a very competitive quote they were given the job and duly replaced the door. Although we still have a small amount of filling in work to complete above the door it has to be said that this was money well spent and anybody who has had to operate it will certainly bear testimony that pressing a button to make the door go up and down to open and close it certainly beats all that pulling on the chain that was required before.

Attention now turned to moving forward with the internal changes and a number of visits were made to the depot to start evaluating what was required and what could be achieved. One of the main requirements was to increase the size of the control room and at the same time provide a second entry/exit point to meet the fire regulations and also to put in a ceiling within the main room. Refurbishing the loo, fitting a shower and a basic kitchen were all on the list.

On one of these visits Trevor Perkins was deemed responsible for producing a large, scale drawing on one of the whiteboards of the revised control room. This turned out to be our one and only drawing for the whole of the refurbishment that subsequently transpired. With the approval of the committee and the decision to install worktops around the walls of the control room rather than having a mismatch of tables, a date for starting the work was circulated; Friday September 30th 2011.

A good team of people turned out but before any of the work could get underway all of the contents of the control room had to be moved out into the meeting room. This then allowed the existing end wall of the control room to be removed with the intention of just putting in a new doorway to give the second exit point.



Of course those plans very quickly changed when it was realised that the existing ceiling was supported by the wall and so this was taken down and had to be replaced. Work also got underway on putting in the new timber joists to carry the ceiling. Another skip was on site for all of the rubbish but almost as soon as some of it was thrown in, the "wood magpies" were on hand to saw it all up and take it away for burning; Not a problem as it gave more room in the skip for the general rubbish.

There were some concerns expressed that the joists that were being put in were rather large and there were also too many and could we not double up on the spacing and make them smaller as we were not proposing to store "Elephants" in the loft space? The joist size was chosen so that we had a nice strong construction that would take not quite "Elephants" but for anybody who has had to handle any of the vast collection of display boards that we have amassed over the years will know they weigh quite a considerable amount and our only storage location is in the loft space. Also if you increase the spacing the end result is a ceiling that sags and looks rubbish, not something that we wanted. We were getting rid of one and did not need another to replace it.

That first day was long but extremely productive and when, on Saturday, Barrie Hemming came down to put his carpentry skills to good use he was able, with a team of helpers, to set about constructing some new stud walling to go around the internal walls of the control room. Interestingly they took the decision to build some of this outside in the yard. Getting into the building proved to be slightly

problematic and it was not long before the saw came out and it was cut into two sections and fixed back together once inside!



It was very much a "bees around a honey pot" situation with people working in all sorts of locations, both internally and externally, on jobs that many had never tackled before and as one job was completed a request was made to Paul Taylor "What can we do now". As was said earlier, there was only one drawing and this only related to one small part of the project so although Paul was not actually doing all of the work he did have a hand in almost all of what was being undertaken, acting very much as a "Project Manager / Architect and Foreman" and directed the team towards the various jobs, answering the queries and undertaking his own work at the same time. By the end of day two, which had been another very long day, the level of progress was vast.

Sunday again saw another good team working very hard and with sections of the stud walling being completed, insulation was being cut and fitted by some while others were cutting and fitting plasterboard. If you stopped still or left your tools in the timberwork you were likely to be entombed in the wall with them.

The main room ceiling timber was completed and some of its covering plasterboard fitted and it was then that the transformation really started to show itself. Following on from the team who had cleared the back room and fitted all the timber joists on the Saturday it was possible for a start to be made on the stud walls for a new loo/ shower and kitchen. Three long, hard but very productive days had kick started the project off to a flying start and by the time everybody left on the Sunday they were all very pleased with the progress made.



Due to holidays and other commitments it was a few weeks before another couple of days could be spent on the project and this was very much a repeat of the previous weekend. People just coming to the depot and getting on with whatever needed doing and this has been repeated on every session that has been held since, to move things forward as much as possible.

Initially the plan had been to just have the ceiling and walls in the main room plastered, however once the chap had been and given an indication of his costs it was decided to get as much plastered as possible and also to put up some additional plasterboard over the exposed concrete block walls to cover them up and provide in doing so a much quicker and easier surface for them to cover up. Once the GSS Library Room is plastered out in the very near future all of the block walls in the main section of the building will have been covered up. Vast amounts of insulation have been used throughout the construction in the walls, ceilings and the adjoining walls between our rooms and the ambulance garage. Gone is that feeling that it is warmer outside the building than inside and now we will not have to sit there for meetings wrapped up in full "arctic weather gear". At the moment we do not have any heating running and it is much warmer than it used to be.

With the plastering completed progress has revolved around getting it all painted and new lighting installed in the main room. This now means that the control room can be emptied of its contents so that this room too can be completed. The new kitchen is progressing well with the installation of its new tiled floor and it will not be long before the plumbing can be started and hot water will be

available for washing hands. All of these walls and that of the new loo and shower have been faced with 18mm ply wood rather than just plasterboard. To be fair a much more costly construction but it gives a vastly improved surface for the wall tiles and for fixing such things as wall cupboards, shower units and water heaters etc. without the worry of having to remember where all of the timber supports are. Also, where we are not tiling (for instance behind the kitchen units) it gives a stronger and longer lasting surface.

Lots of new lights are being fitted so you will no longer need to wear your caving lamps to move around inside the building. On top of the worktops that have been fitted in the control room there will be wall mounted trunking to carry all of the cables for the various computer, phone, and electrical outlets.

Of course there is still a lot of work to be done but we can certainly see the light at the end of the tunnel and what has been achieved would not have been completed without a big team effort. We have set ourselves a target of having an official opening in May 2012 which does seem to be quite a way off but it is amazing how time flies when you are having fun.

So please keep an eye on your e mails from GCRG to see when the next working session is planned as there are still jobs for everybody. It might only involve sweeping up or taking a load of rubbish to the tip or helping to thread cables or installing the new windows but it all helps the job go in the right direction.

It is fair to say that a lot of money has been spent on this project and our reserve fund will be very much smaller at the end of it. However, it is also fair to say that this is a job that is very much well overdue and when completed will leave the group with a vastly improved property that we can all be very proud of and not be ashamed to take people too from outside of the group.

(Please read the accompanying article on "Funding for Teams" as this is what has allowed the group to move the refurbishment project forward to such an extent)

It is not fair to name anybody individually as having done more than anybody else it has all been a "big team effort". However I would like to give Nicky Bayley a special mention as without her efforts and need to see the place cleared up I think we would still be looking up at the ceiling in the main room and saying "we need to do something about that" and not moving forward.

Thanks go to everybody who has helped out. The project would not be where it is without your help and efforts.

Paul Taylor (photos by Dave Appleing)

PRACTICE EXERCISES INVOLVING GCRG**Snailbeach Lead Mine**

4th – 5th September 2011

How many teams can you fit in one hole?

Midlands Cave Rescue Organisation (MCRO) is formed from local cavers and mine explorers who are based in the West Midlands, Shropshire and beyond. What most people don't realise is that there are literally thousands of holes in the ground in the area that we cover.

As one of the smaller cave rescue teams in Britain, in the event of a major rescue, MCRO would be calling in many of the neighbouring cave rescue teams to provide additional rescuers, support and equipment. Whilst we already work very closely with Gloucestershire CRG (GCRG), the weekend of 4 and 5 September 2011 saw representatives from a staggering eight cave rescue teams based in England and Wales training together (which must be a record!). Of the 45 representatives, team members represented MCRO, GCRG, Derbyshire CRO, Cave Rescue Organisation, Mendip CRO, South East CRO, North Wales CRO and South and Mid Wales CRT.

The weekend's training was to be a real triumph of multi teams working hand in hand and just to add the final blend of complexity, there were two members of the Hungarian Cave Rescue Service along with two Poles and one Lebanese caver (all now members of home teams) thrown in for good measure! One thing was for sure, that with this diversity and the Shropshire and Black Country dialects, communication had to be good!

The weekend's training event was being hosted by the MCRO, incorporating an underground training exercise on the Saturday followed by a series of surface talks and demonstrations on the Sunday. The evening of Friday 3 September 2011 saw a collection of cave rescuers from far and wide descending upon the small village of Pennerley near Minsterley in the Shropshire Hills for a weekend of filth, mud, toil and underground talk!

Saturday's exercise was to focus on communication and pitch rigging to simulate the extraction of a casualty from the 40 yard level in the nearby abandoned Snailbeach Lead Mine in the village of Snailbeach. Snailbeach was the biggest lead mine in Shropshire and is said to have achieved the greatest volume of lead per acre of any mine in Europe. Underground mining finally halted in 1955 but its long history can be traced back to Roman times and the surface buildings are the most complete set in the county and are without doubt some of the best in the country. The mine was chiefly worked for lead ore but quantities of barite, fluorspar, silver, calcite and zinc were also won. It achieved a depth of 1562' but today it is now possible to descend only as far as the 112 yard level without diving due to flooding of the lower workings.

There is nothing like a real-life incident to set the scene and after a 999 ambulance call-out to one of the team members at the campsite due to collapsing with severe stomach pains and vomiting; teams were quickly formed on the Saturday morning by the two surface controllers. The teams were tasked with specific roles including pitch rigging, communications, stretcher carrying and a team to work on the entrance level to assist with the decision-making process of BCRC in selecting a preferred gas detector to be funded by the MREW grant.

Communications to the control base from the entrance were handled via VHF radios. Underground communications were to utilise a combination of both the HeyPhone to allow contact with the surface, and PMR radios between the various teams to allow communication along the mine levels. Due to the nature of ground disturbance with voids, back filled stopes etc past experience had taught us that the HeyPhone may prove problematic at this mine but in fact it worked exceedingly well from the hillside directly above the mine to the top of the first pitch.

To reach our casualty involved the descent of effectively five pitches (3 vertical and 2 slopes at approximately 50 degrees) which in total was a descent and haul of approximately 150metres. For this exercise we had deliberately chosen not to use a live casualty (although a very realistic weight!) due to instability in one area of the mine and once reached by the stretcher party, the casualty was packaged into a REACT stretcher taking care to ensure none of his insides were likely to fall out!

For each pitch the surface control had deployed the teams with two standardised rigging kits which basically consist of 50metres of colour-coded static rope along with all the necessary kit to set up a "z" rig haul system using Petzl Rigs as the belay device. MCRO has recently switched to these having previously used Petzl Stops and Grigris and so far, after initial skepticism about the suitability of the device in underground situations, we have been very impressed. Its similarity to a Petzl Grigri means even those not too familiar with the device quickly pick it up safely. On the two sloping pitches our overseas colleagues instigated hauling using a counterbalance system, whereby as the stretcher made its way up the slope helped by the barrow boy, a member of the haul team came back down the slope acting as a counter weight, a technique not currently used by MCRO.

Less than four hours after the start of the casualty moving he reached the surface in what was a very commendable time. In reality, with a live casualty, this time would increase as casualty care dictated and on this exercise, if anything, we were caught out by the speed with which the stretcher made its way to surface.

Summing up the practice we were very impressed with how well the members of all eight teams integrated. This is essential in cave rescue, as in the event of a long or complex rescue stretching over maybe 24 hours, assistance would have to be sought from other teams and this is the reason that MCRO has tried to mirror equipment and techniques with that of GCRG.

The only thing left to do was look despondently at the pile of mud that contained the stretcher and ten rigging kits. Fortunately the kits were split between MCRO and GCRG so at least the 500metres plus of rope was not all headed for one set of willing cleaning hands! With our colleague safely back from hospital, the only thing left to do was discuss events over a pint or two and look forward to the talks tomorrow!

After a very pleasant evening in the Stiperstones Inn, Sunday saw a varied wealth of presentations. After an initial introduction by Steve Holding (MCRO Chairman) and a brief photographic presentation of recent MCRO events, we were put on the straight and narrow with an entertaining presentation on "An introduction to law for cave rescuers" by Anthony Rich (BCRC & MREW Legal Adviser), followed by an informative update of BCRC, MREW and UKSAR by Bill Whitehouse (BCRC Chairman). Then it was time for a leg stretch to a nearby mine shaft to see the amazing MineCam in action, a remote controlled video camera for shaft exploration with demonstrations kindly provided by Peter Eggleston and Kelvin Lake. In the afternoon, Paul Taylor (GCRG Chairman)

demonstrated SARCALL and its benefits which is increasing in prevalence within cave rescue teams, and is currently being considered by MCRO. Tibor Dianovszki took us on a whirlwind tour of the history of the Hungarian Cave Rescue Service with "Rescue beyond borders ... the Hungarian Experience" and discussed the increasing cross-border co-operation between countries in mainland Europe following some lengthy rescues, one of which lasted five days. The afternoon ended with a presentation on the "Use of Gas Detectors", which was of particular relevance as BCRC is currently working on supplying all teams with two detectors, with support from MREW.

This was the second such multi-team weekend training event that MCRO has hosted and has proved to be an excellent opportunity to work together, share ideas and knowledge between local cave rescue teams. We would like to express our thanks to all those who attended and participated in the weekend, all of whom contributed to its success. In particular, we would like to thank the contributors to the Sunday programme and Bill Whitehouse (BCRC Chairman), Pete Allwright (BCRC Secretary), Anthony Rich (BCRC Legal Adviser) and Paul Taylor (GCRG Chairman) for their continued support and the residents of Snailbeach.

Emma Porter (MCRO Warden) and Graham Smith (MCRO Warden)

RESCUE CALLOUTS INVOLVING GCRG

Snailbeach Mine Rescue Incident

16th November 2011

Snailbeach lead mine is located in the village of Snailbeach, Shropshire, and is approximately 10 miles south of Shrewsbury.

In September 2011 it was the site of a multi cave rescue team training exercise and it was rather ironical to be responding to a rescue incident to the same location only a couple of months later.

Background

A small party of cavers had entered the mine to explore down to one of the main levels within the complex and had reached this via a series of SRT pitches and fixed ladders. While descending the last of the fixed ladders a female member of the party (Emily Sellick) suffered an epileptic fit. This resulted in her falling off the ladder to the floor. She suffered a number of further fits and following an initial examination by her boyfriend (trainee Paramedic) she reported that she had lost the feeling in her legs and was inconsiderable pain around the pelvis and as such would not be able to make her own way out of the mine. The leader of the trip despatched another member of the party back to the surface to raise the alarm. (Purely coincidentally, her final resting position following the accident was within mm of where the casualty for the exercise had been placed back in September).

Raising the alarm

The initial call was made to one of the Midland Cave Rescue Organisation (MCRO) controllers who in turn informed the West Mercia Police. Other MCRO controllers

were informed and they dealt with the contacting of the MCRO Members, collection of equipment from the two stores and also Emma Porter phoned Paul Taylor from GCRG. However on not getting a reply she worked out that as it was a Wednesday evening that he was very likely caving, she also phoned Dave Appleing at 21:40 and made contact with him and asked for a formal response from GCRG to attend the incident.

GCRG actions

Dave was not able to access the SARCALL system at this point in time as his computer was not on. He made contact with Gloucestershire police control and experienced some difficulty in obtaining an incident number but did finally manage to get one. He then proceeded to contact a number of GCRG Members in Cheltenham and also GCRG warden, Steve Tomalin, in Gloucester.

Following a discussion with Dave, Steve took the decision to implement the SARCALL system and sent out an initial message to all of the GCRG team members that there was a serious incident at the Snailbeach mine and could people respond by contacting him. (*Steve admits that in hindsight he did make a mistake with this message as he failed to include his contact details. However this is only the second time that we have operated the system in anger and it is all part of the learning curve.*)

The SARCALL message resulted in a number of people making contact with Steve and with those already contacted by Dave, this resulted in a total of 21 GCRG members attending the incident and a total attendance from MCRO and GCRG of 51 members.

As the initial request from Emma had been for persons and equipment, Craig Cameron, Tim Hemming and Ed Williams were despatched to the GCRG depot to load up the Land Rover and drive it up to Shropshire.

Arriving back at the vehicle after an evening's digging at Hole-in-the-Hedge, Paul Taylor had a look at his phone and saw that there were three missed calls and a SARCALL message. As the Wet Sink parking location is not the best for mobile reception he waited till he had come out of the valley bottom before contacting Steve.

As the Land Rover party had not yet left the depot, Paul travelled over to there and joined Craig and Tim with the final equipment loading. Ed Williams had already departed en route back to Gloucester to pick up Gareth Jones and Paul's SRT equipment. Because Paul had recently driven up to Snailbeach he drove the Land Rover with Tim in the back with all the gear while Craig dealt with all the incoming text messages. Departure from the depot was approximately 00:00. En-route, a further SARCALL message from Steve was received confirming that the GCRG incident control was now being handled by Pete Turier (*again, this shows how the SARCALL system can easily provide the bulk transmitting of information to those already on the move and those still waiting to respond. One message typed out and sent to the whole membership*)

The GCRG Land Rover arrived at Snailbeach village hall (incident control location) at 01:45 (many other GCRG members were already on site) and it had been the intention of Paul Taylor to set up his mobile phone and access the SARCALL incident log and enter some updated information so that Pete back in Gloucester would know what was going on. However once signed in, a request from the MCRO Incident Controller to assist with a communications problem resulted in this part of the plan failing to happen. (*It has now been suggested that once at*

an incident a person is designated as the GCRG Point of Contact and also a further person is given the task of making the inputs into the SARCALL log. It is felt that this will vastly improve our response and recording of the incident as far as GCRG is concerned).

Not only did we have with us the GCRG SAR Radios we also had the recently purchased MCRO radios. The latter were taken out of their boxes and put on charge and then Gareth Jones and Paul Taylor set off in the Land Rover to the surface incident control location at Chapel Shaft and set up a comms link back down to the incident control. Due to the volume of comms traffic that was having to be dealt with, both from the surface and from underground, when Paul Taylor returned to the Chapel Shaft later he took on the role of dealing with the surface comms leaving Pete Eckleston to deal solely with the underground comms. This proved to be very beneficial for all concerned.

Exit route for the casualty

Back in September, one of the main objectives of the exercise at the site had been to utilise as many of those attending as possible and so the casualty took the long route via all of the pitches back out of the system. However, for this incident, although this would have been possible with the numbers of people available, the closeness of the 90m Chapel Shaft, although involving a much longer single haul, would provide for a much speedier exit route for the casualty back to the surface and was the preferred choice.

Rigging of the Chapel shaft for casualty evacuation

Fortunately, a large tripod had been acquired and was positioned over the shaft top. This is enclosed by a 1m high stone wall with a steel grill and trap-door positioned on the top to give access to the shaft.

Two 4x4 vehicles were positioned in line with one another on either side the shaft up and down the slope and with two main hauling ropes were run down the shaft. Both of these ropes were rigged with Z rigs and an additional pulley added to the rope running to the down slope side to deviate the haul into a more downwards direction rather than sideways. This dramatically reduced the side load on the tripod. A third rope provided the SRT route into and out of the mine.

Four or five people were used for the hauling on the down slope rope and a similar number were employed on the up slope when the load was transferred for the final section of the haul.

For approximately 85 of the 90m, the stretcher was brought up in a horizontal position and this proved to be a much more comfortable position for the casualty to travel in, with the doctor acting as Barrow Boy throughout, using the previously mentioned third rope to Prussik up. Hauling time for the shaft was approximately 25 minutes. Once the stretcher was within approximately 5m of the top of the shaft, hauling was stopped and the casualty informed that it was now necessary to adjust the stretcher into a vertical position so as to pass through the restricted opening in the shaft top. For this manoeuvre to be undertaken the hauling is transferred to the second rope which is attached to the top of the stretcher and all the remaining hauling is now completed by this rope. Some manual assistance was required to get the stretcher out of the shaft but this all went very well and the casualty reached the surface at 03:30 and was soon transferred to a waiting ambulance.

(It is worth noting at this point that it had been necessary to bring this additional ambulance to the incident as the HART Vehicles were not capable of dealing with the casualty. The amount medical resources tied up for this incident was in my opinion completely unnecessary and extremely wasteful).

Casualty care response

Following the initial call to the police and the arrival of the MCRO team it was not long before a HART team (Hazardous Area Response Team) from West Midlands Ambulance arrived at the incident. Despite being assured that there were Advanced First Aiders within the cave rescue team, one of the male members of this team insisted that he be taken underground. This was despite not having any caving experience or SRT equipment and being completely inappropriately dressed for the trip. He had to be lowered with a "buddy caver" down all of the pitches and subsequently hauled back up all of the pitches when he exited some hours later (we will come back to this point later).

As previously stated, the casualty's boyfriend was a trainee paramedic and had carried out some initial examination and first aid, utilising what was described as the BIGGEST first aid kit you have ever seen on a caving trip.

Further examination of the casualty was undertaken by the HART paramedic and then the casualty was passed over to the cave rescue team members for packaging ready to make the exit from the mine.

By this time Dr Mandy Williams was now on site and ready to go underground. The HART paramedic insisted that this was not necessary as he had the matter completely under control. However Mandy, and rightly so, was not happy with this decision and insisted that she was going into the mine to examine the casualty.

(Comment - As the HART paramedic was to subsequently refuse to be hauled out of the shaft, despite this being the most appropriate and quickest route for him out of the system, it is unsure how he felt that he could safely say that the medical situation underground was completely under control, and that a Doctor was not required. It raises a very interesting question as to how he felt he would deal with a medical emergency with the casualty if he had despatched her up the shaft without any on-hand assistance. Despite the insistence from the surface control team that he remain at the bottom of the shaft while discussions with his other HART team members on the surface took place, (who incidentally pointed out that they had NO CONTROL over his actions while in the mine) he left the shaft and started to make his way out. This required for him to be hauled up every pitch where he finally reached the surface approximately 2 hours later. This was in the order of 1.5 hours longer than if he had come up the shaft. His actions placed a considerable unnecessary extra level of stress and responsibility on those who had to bring him out and I think it would not be unfair if this incident was recorded as a double rescue as he was incapable of getting himself out of the mine).

Afterwards

With all up the shaft who wished to be, all of the ropes and equipment were removed and everybody returned to the village hall where they were all booked out of the "T Card" system. The police and the HART Team Leader requested that a debrief be held there and then, but with 2 hours driving back to the Forest and surrounding area to complete, the GCRG members departed.

All of the GCRG Equipment was loaded up and the Land Rover departed at 04:30.

With a number of MCRO members still in the mine, the new MCRO radios were brought into use to maintain a comms link back to the exit entrance from the incident control until all had exited.

Conclusions

From the GCRG side this was a good incident for members to be involved in. As it transpired, not many of those who attended got involved with the actual hauling etc. However had the route up the Chapel Shaft proved to not be a viable one then everybody, and more, would have been needed for the alternative route out of the mine via all of the pitches. It was therefore good that the incident control knew that he had that reserve available if required.

The SARCALL system worked very well in providing that "quick bulk information transfer". Yes, we are aware that there were problems with delays in the transmitting of messages to landline numbers. This is not a direct fault with SARCALL, just a glitch in the BT system which we hope has now been addressed.

Lessons were learnt on all fronts from those involved with the callout through to the individuals own response. A change in the way we as a group deal with attending an incident in support of another team can only benefit us all in the long run. Questions need to be asked regarding the placing of a team in a situation where they are forced to take somebody underground rather than having the ability to make that decision themselves. This is something that we within GCRG have already discussed with GFRS and they have made it quite clear that they will support us in whatever decision we make at the time.

I for one would be totally supportive of a CAVE RESCUE doctor in making a decision regarding whether they went underground to a casualty, allied with the information being fed back to the surface from any Advanced First Aider.

Thanks to everybody who responded to this incident whether you travelled to the site or were ready to do so if required or manned the phones in Gloucestershire. It was a long night and many I know got very little sleep if at all. A great TEAM EFFORT for all concerned.

Paul Taylor (Chairman GCRG)

GCRG MOVES TO SARCALL

Within GCRG we have had, ever since the group was formed, a callout procedure based on a "cascade system" whereby initial contact (be it from the Police, Gloucester Fire & Rescue Service or a neighbouring cave rescue team) is made with the group via one of the wardens. The Wardens would then discuss amongst themselves as to the level of response or action to be taken. Each warden would then be responsible for contacting (where appropriate) those GCRG members on their list via a series of phone calls. This could be very time consuming for the wardens and also extremely frustrating when answering machines or in use numbers are reached. However until recent years this was the only method available.

Over the years and with the advancements in technology, the move towards the use of pagers by some team members and the increasing levels of the use of

mobile phones certainly played their respective parts in increasing the availability of members as far as contact was concerned. This however still relied on the need to individually dial numbers.

GCRG's involvement with the Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Group resulted in a significant move forward when four of the GCRG wardens were issued with message pagers funded by the GFRS. Each of these wardens was teamed with a "buddy warden" for periods of holidays etc. so that coverage was maintained. This proved initially to be a significant move forward in improving the link between the respective control rooms of the Police, Fire and Rescue and GCRG.

As time progressed various aspects of the system began to fall apart. Control room testing became very infrequent, two pagers were lost and although replaced this was with just "tone only" pagers, were not as good. Battery life became an issue and even when tested, the ability of the pager units to respond to the activation grew ever questionable. Eventually this reached a level where the wardens became completely untrusting in them and then did not bother to take the pagers with them.

Mobile phones were becoming ever more popular and reliable as well as a significant part of everyday life and with this came the increasing use of SMS text messaging and with it the ability to make use of multi-person messaging. Within GCRG we raised this question with GFRS to be considered as a potential improvement to our callout situation. However we were told that it was not possible and pagers were the way forward.

Unhappy with this situation it was felt that it was time to take the "bull by the horns" so to speak and we returned all of the pagers to GFRS stating that we were not going to use them anymore and it was essential that an alternative method of contact was developed.

We were not surprised in any way when we were told that a multi-person SMS system was available and that GCRG would be moved onto it straight away. However it would still only have four recipients but this was certainly a significant move forward. With further changes within GFRS the initial four was soon increased to all of the GCRG Wardens. This very much increased the number of people who would be available to respond to an "initial call" all be it only via a message to their respective mobile phones. Certainly a great move forward.

We now move forward to early November 2010 and the attendance by Paul Taylor to the MREW (Mountain Rescue England & Wales) general meeting in Preston. By a fluke Paul ended up attending the Communications sub-group meeting during which the SARCALL system was discussed and briefly demonstrated.

Following this, Paul was involved with manning the BCRC (British Cave Rescue Council) stand at the Emergency Service Show the following week. During this a further conversation with Jon Whiteley of the DCRO (Devon Cave Rescue Organisation) who was acting as a local "Front Man" for the system, resulted in a full blown presentation and demonstration of the system. This proved to be extremely interesting and Paul could see that this was just what GCRG needed and brought his thoughts and ideas back to the GCRG Committee who were also very impressed by the system.

As we know, SMS text messaging is not new nor is bulk messaging and many rescue teams across the country having been using various forms of this type of messaging for callout and team notification for some time. GCRG have in fact themselves been on an SMS system with their calling authority, Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service for quite some time.

The BIG DIFFERENCE with SARCALL lies in three main areas:

1. The system is based entirely on the Web
2. Teams have control over the information that is in the system about their respective teams
3. Multi numbers and receiving mediums can be used

At this stage it is not the intention to go into the ins and outs of how the system works as this we can cover more effectively at a GCRG training session. What we can say is that SARCALL is a bulk SMS text messaging platform that has been developed in North Wales by John Hulse of the Ogwen Valley MRT and has now been in use by all of the North Wales Mountain & Cave Rescue Teams and the North Wales Police for nearly 3 years as their primary method of callout. It has proved to be a very reliable system.

The system works at two levels:

1. Team Level
2. Calling Authority Level

To get the most out of the system both levels need to be using it. For GCRG, our calling authority is GFRS and so a meeting was set up to provide them with a presentation and demonstration of how the system worked. This was undertaken by Jon Whiteley with both Gareth Jones and Paul Taylor also attending. This proved to be extremely productive and by 08:30 on the morning after the meeting, confirmation was received from GFRS that they would like to adopt the system.

This was great news and within GCRG we set about completing our side of the work to get SARCALL operational at team level. Primarily this involved transferring the various lists of GCRG members that the wardens have into the SARCALL system. With this completed it was planned that both GCRG and GFRS would go fully live with the system on August 15th 2011 at both the team level and the calling authority Level. A number of tests had been made in the weeks leading up to the go live date it had not been the teams intention to put the system into operation until full training of the GCRG wardens had taken place.

However, events unfolded on August 7th 2011 at Daren Cilau cave near to Abergavenny in South Wales which gave Paul Taylor (GCRG Chairman and warden) to take the opportunity to make use of the system. He received a request from Toby Dryden of the S&MWCRT (South and Mid Wales Cave Rescue Team) to place the GCRG on standby for a possible attendance at the incident. This was a golden opportunity not to be missed and an initial message was sent out to all of the GCRG Wardens followed by a message then being sent out to the full GCRG team. Mobiles and home numbers for around 100 people were covered in six minutes. It could have been a lot quicker but would certainly have not been possible even with the four phones available in his office to have passed the information over to that number of people in the time.

These messages were followed by a series of further messages throughout the evening as the incident developed. Some will say that this is not the same as speaking to people or knowing what level of response that you are going to get. I would be the first to admit that this is the case but as a method of getting BULK INFORMATION OUT QUICKLY you can't beat it. Despite many GCRG members getting the information "cold" it all worked very well and prompted numerous people to make contact and advise that they were not available for a variety of reasons. The initial time saving was great and produced a "breathing space" to get on with other matters. A lot of lessons were learnt which would not have come to light otherwise and so it has been an excellent learning curve. Already the group is moving into the next stage of increasing the coverage to include work phone numbers and emails.

A training session for the GCRG Wardens has also taken place and all have reported that they are very impressed with the system and can see that it has some great advantages over the old system.

In mid-November 2011 the system was further used by Steve Tomalin to pass out the initial information in relationship to the Snailbeach Incident. Again, the use of the system proved to be very beneficial for all concerned.

The overall feedback that has been received from the GCRG members has been extremely positive. It is also good to see that not only have GFRS adopted it without any hesitation; they have further endorsed the system by requesting that SARA use it as their method of contact. It is a system that is being developed and improved all of the time and it would be silly to try and cover all of the aspects within this report, and as stated previously, at the next GCRG depot-based training session it is intended to cover the subject in greater depth.

If you have any thoughts and comments on the system please do not hesitate to pass them onto Gareth Jones info@gcrg.org.uk as he is the GCRG administrator for the system.

Thanks go to both John Hulse and Jon Whiteley for all their help in assisting GCRG with the change over to SARCALL at to GFRS for so readily accepting and incorporating the system.

MEETING WITH GLOS FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Within Gloucestershire the Police have passed the responsibility for co-ordinating the callout of the various voluntary rescue teams (primarily GCRG & SARA (Severn Area Rescue Association) to GFRS (Glos Fire and Rescue Service). For both GCRG and SARA this is undertaken via the SARCALL system.

GFRS are our calling authority and before anybody starts going on about policy primacy, we, Gloucestershire Constabulary and GFRS are all well aware of this and all are working together; the police still providing the insurance cover.

We are also very aware that this is very different to the situation within the rest of the country. However for us in Gloucestershire it works very well. Over the years a number of Multi-Agency exercises have taken place but these have all been held in either working mines or the tourist mines within the Forest of Dean area. Both GCRG and GFRS have come together at cave rescue incidents (notably at Ban-y-gor Cave, Wet Sink and more recently at Old Ham Iron Mine and Symonds Yat "C" Caves).

However, although this has resulted in working relationships at the time they are not the place or the time to have a serious discussion, talk about procedures or examine methods and equipment. GCRG also takes a very active part in supporting the voluntary group section of the Gloucestershire LRF (Local Resilience Forum) which fortunately for us is chaired by a senior GRFS Officer who we have built up a very excellent working relationship with.

From this came the idea that it would be good for both GFRS and GCRG to undertake more joint training and it was decided to hold an exercise at Symonds Yat in one of the "C" Caves on December 10th. Prior to this exercise a meeting was held between the Chairman of GCRG and two reps from GFRS at Coleford Fire Station. From the discussions that took place it became very apparent that although all parties agreed that an exercise would be of considerable benefit to all concerned, an indoor meeting whereby the various methods and procedures operated by the two parties could be shown and discussed. This would be of a much greater benefit and then could be followed with an exercise at a later date.

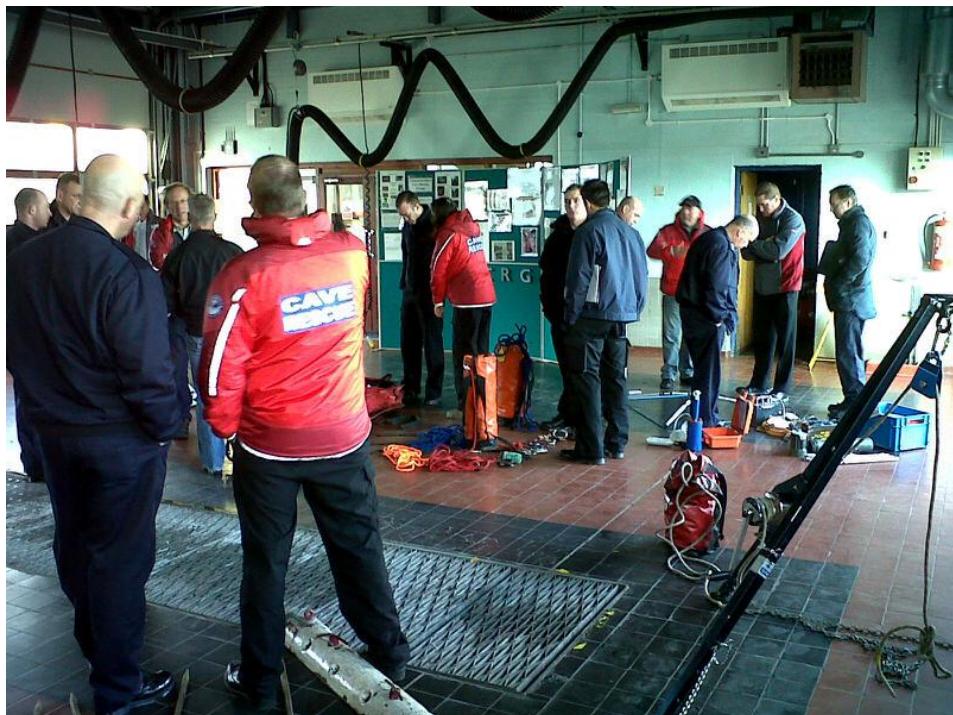
The date was left the same and GFRS took on the job of inviting representatives from within their own organisation (primarily the rope access teams from Lydney and Coleford who are the main people that GCRG would be interacting with at an incident) along with representatives from a number of Fire and Rescue services who border Gloucestershire. In fact we ended up with people from Oxford, Avon, Hereford and Worcester and the new Deputy Gaveller for the Forest of Dean, Daniel Howell.

GFRS gave an over-view of their command & control system and the way they identify (using different coloured tabards) the various levels of authority within this system.



GCRG put on a number of presentations showing how the group was made up, trained and responded, an overview of the SARCALL system and an explanation of the "T Card" system used by the group and other cave rescue teams. GCRG has provided a number of these boards to the Lebanese Cave Rescue team so that they also now use the system.

There was also a static picture display and a variety of the group's equipment along with equipment from the rope rescue teams' in the garage. With a good turnout of GCRG members this gave the opportunity for plenty of discussion to take place and this greatly improved the understanding from all sides of how we all fit in together, both in a control way and with our respective equipment. (The newly arrived MREW Jackets were very evident and proved to be very warm)



Within GCRG we are well aware that the GFRS are going to be able to normally respond to a cave or mine rescue incident well in advance of the GCRG, however events like this can only broaden the knowledge and understanding of both organisations of how the other will react to an incident. The GFRS personal who will make up their initial response now have a much greater understanding of GCRG and know that those who arrive on site from GCRG have the knowledge and expertise to deal with the incident.

As a follow up from this event in the early part of 2012 GCRG has been asked by GFRS to repeat the presentations and displays as part of the on-going training of the GFRS Watch Commanders and other related officers.

Paul Taylor (photos by Craig Cameron)

TRAINING

SLAUGHTER STREAM CAVE

4th December 2011

Gloucestershire Cave Rescue Group held a very successful training exercise at the beginning of December. This involved the rigging of all the four pitches that form the Entrance Series at Wet Sink providing access to the Slaughter Stream Cave at Joyford in the Forest of Dean.

The group has trained here on previous occasions and also undertaken three rescues that have involved part or all of the pitches so feel it is good to keep the methods and procedures fresh in the minds of those required to undertake the work.

Three separate teams worked both underground & on the surface. Rigging / Hauling of the lower 12m Pen Pot pitch was undertaken from the small chamber below the Balcony pitch and this in turn provided the main location for the subsequent hauling for the 5m Balcony pitch.

Due to the extremely limited space available at the top of the Mouse Aven, 12m pitch hauling was again undertaken from the bottom using an additional pair of pulleys to change the direction of haul back along the passage towards the choke. This is quite a constricted area but proved to be very functional for both hauling and lowering of the stretcher. For the pitch from the entrance gate down 15m the hauling location is situated out on the surface. All of the hauling was undertaken using Z rigs. It was good to see an excellent turn out of people to the exercise and also to see different people taking on the various rolls both underground and on the surface.

Special thanks are extended to Tom Handley, a new recruit, who volunteered his services to be the casualty for the day. Being quite a large chap this did prove to be a bit problematic at the top of the Mouse Aven pitch. Despite considerable effort and determination to pass through the tight section, it was realised that having his hands & arms crossed over his chest increased his size too much and it was not possible to get him through. He was subsequently lowered back down again. Good practice for the hauling teams below in dealing with this request.

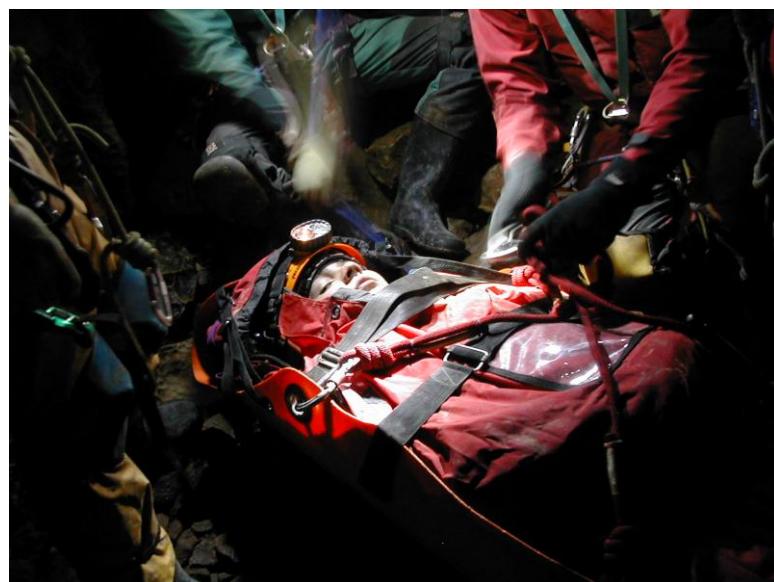
This was a very useful learning point and much better to gain that knowledge in a practice, rather than on a real incident. All in all an excellent exercise and thanks are extended to everybody who attended and also those who came back to the depot afterwards and helped with the cleaning of all the kit.

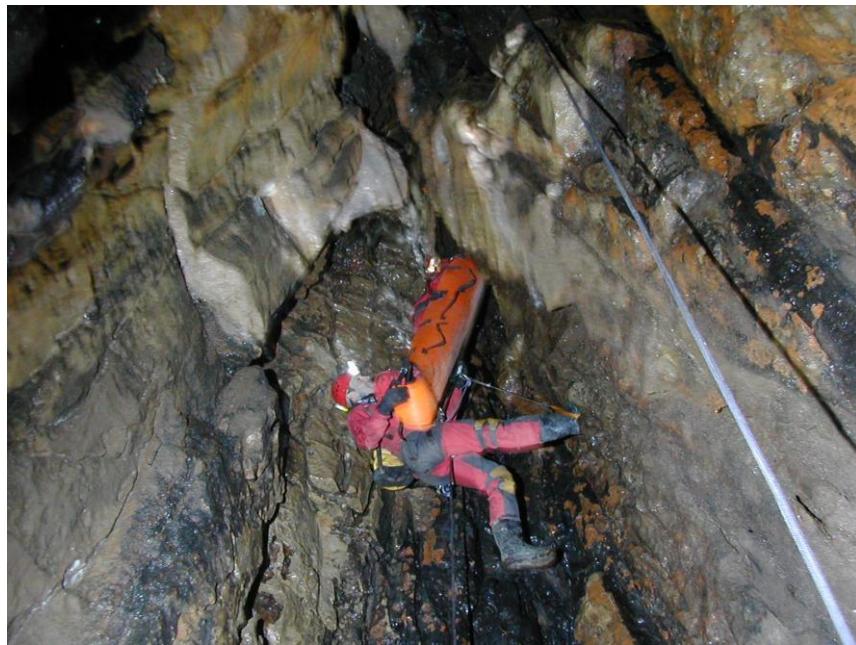
The exercise also identified a number of locations where additional anchor points for rescue rigging would provide considerable assistance. Holes have been prepared ready for insertion of some additional P hangers which fortunately the group has in stock from the original source and are just waiting to arrange for a Trained Installer to come along and undertake the necessary work.

Footnote. If anybody who attended the MCRO Training Exercise in September at Snailbeach Mine Shropshire has come across a Petzl Handed Jammer in their kit GCRG has lost one.

Contact chairman@gcrg.org.uk to organise its return

A few pictures from the exercise:





Paul Taylor (photos by Gareth Jones)

Sunday 8 January 2012 - MCRO Training Day

Thirty-five cave rescuers, cavers and mine explorers, descended upon Total Access (UK) Limited's classrooms and training centre facilities once again on Sunday 8th January 2012 for a day of presentations, classroom and practical training.

After an introduction by Steve Holding (MCRO Chairman) and Mike Clayton (MCRO Secretary), Paul Taylor (GCRG Chairman) started the training by providing an update on the ongoing development and expansion of the Sarcall integrated platform, which both MCRO and GCRG are embracing.

Sarcall is a system that has been developed to assist with the call out of Mountain and Cave Rescue Teams across the UK and Ireland, utilising email and SMS messaging and is accessible by both teams and the "Calling Authorities" (usually the Police). The system provides an audit trail of what information was received from the original 999 caller and transfers this information accurately and in a time and cost effective way to the wardens and then to team members, eliminating the risk of confusing messages.

The group was then split into two and Mike Clayton and John Morgan ran a practical hands-on session on the use of VHF Radios, whilst GCRG and MCRO Advanced First Aiders ran stretcher packaging sessions. The afternoon was a hive of activity and discussion in the training centre, with Steve Tomalin showing counterbalance methods and others focusing on the use of tripods and z-rigs.

Thank you to Total Access for allowing us to use their fantastic venue, to all those that assisted with the training and to everyone that supported and attended the event. In particular, it was good to see new faces and ones we have not seen for some time and we look forward to seeing you underground.

Emma Porter