

Beachley and Newport

Lifeboats; Land Search; Cliff, Mud, Mountain, Swift Water and Flood Rescue

What is SARA?

SARA is a volunteer search and rescue charity, with Lifeboat and Rescue Stations along the length of the River Severn. The teams based at Beachley (near Chepstow) and Newport work together, to perform rescues on the Usk, Ebbw and Wye as well as the Severn, and to conduct land search and rescue across Gloucestershire. In 2018 these teams conducted 73 different operations.

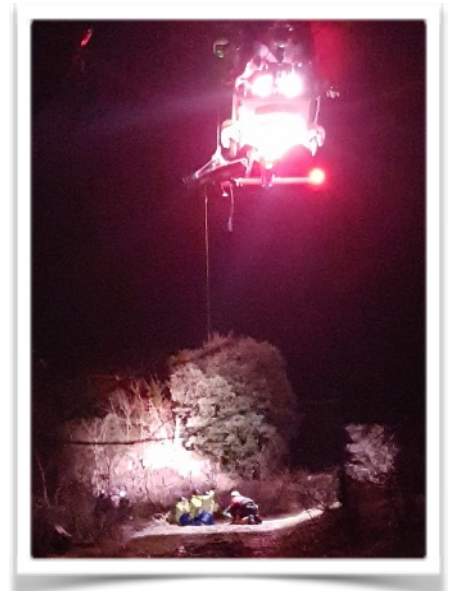
Recent Operations

The early months of 2019 have, as usual, been busy ones for SARA, including a high number of callouts. Most dramatic was at the end of January when land and rope teams were tasked to locate and evacuate a person who had fallen from cliffs in the Lower Wye Valley. Working with our sister team, SARA Tewkesbury, and members of South West Ambulance HART Team, Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service and Chepstow Coastguard, the person was located and moved to a suitable location for evacuation by the coastguard helicopter to hospital.

The land search team was also tasked to jobs in Tewkesbury, Symonds Yat, Malvern and Longhope. Sadly we do sometimes find the body of the missing person, as was the case in Chepstow in March when boat and land teams were mobilised, and SARA Lifeboat 3 located the body of a lady in the Lower Wye.

There have also been searches for missing people, and adrift vessels, out on the Severn. As an example, in April SARA Lifeboat 3 was launched and located a small sailing dinghy not far from Portishead in the main channel. This was recovered back to Beachley, after a long tow against the ebbing spring tide, and handed over to the Coastguard.

We have also been busy training & qualifying our team for the more technical operations. In February, using our own professionally qualified instructors, we ran a Swiftwater & Flood Rescue Course and in parallel a Rope Rescue Operators Course. Then in March, 6 team members (along with 2 from Tewkesbury) were trained as Rope Rescue Supervisors. All of these courses involved 4 or 5 weekend days for the volunteers concerned!



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Winter Skills Training

Heading up to the wintry peaks of Snowdonia on the coldest weekend in January may not be everybody's idea of fun, but a team of nine SARA volunteers from Beachley, Tewkesbury and Wyre Forest Stations did just that, all in the name of Winter Skills training. The generous folk at Ogwen Valley Mountain Rescue Organisation kindly housed us in the bunk room at their base (for a small donation!) and made us feel properly at home with the use of their kitchen, drying room and wood burning stove, all of which saw plenty of action!

The format for day 1 was simply to scale the spectacular jagged peak of Tryfan in the most atrocious weather imaginable, under the watchful eye of an ex-mountain rescue skills instructor, whilst practising confidence roping skills and a bit of navigation using a combination of map, guidebook, compass, altimeter and a photograph of the mountain with lines drawn on it! With incessant rain and winds in excess of 60mph, the day proved a useful test of kit as well as endurance.



After a well-earned beer and dinner out in Betws-y-Coed, day 2 saw a slightly smaller team head up to the summit of Carnedd Dafydd to practise ice-axe and crampon techniques after an overnight flurry of snow. With wind speeds higher than those of the previous day, standing up alone proved enough of a challenge at the summit, and most people found themselves flat on the snow and rocks on a number of occasions. However, with the clearer weather affording spectacular views of the surrounding hills, morale remained high and the team returned safely to base.

SARA needs to be prepared for all eventualities, and whilst we'd rarely expect conditions in the South West to be anything like those experienced over the weekend, our volunteers will go out in any weather and into any terrain, and the skills learned over the weekend will help ensure the safety of the team as they respond to all manner of calls. Our thanks go to Ogwen Valley Mountain Rescue Organisation for hosting us and to Tarquin Shipley for giving up his time to train us.

Chief Constable Visit

SARA is always tasked for callouts by the Emergency Services, and our good relationship with them is vital. It was our pleasure to welcome the Chief Constable of Gloucestershire Constabulary, Rod Hansen, to our HQ at Beachley in February. After a tour of the station and a look at the land search vehicles and the lifeboats, we briefed him on all aspects of our work and had a very useful discussion.



Lifeboat Training

The lifeboat training course concluded in March, with two new members of the Beachley crew and one of the Newport team qualifying as operational crew. Having completed around 9 months of training, in all different aspects of lifeboat operations, they passed their RYA Powerboat Level 2 assessments on the SARA lifeboats, which was their final hurdle. Congratulations to all 3 of them.

Congratulations also to Beachley crewman Dave Deveney, who recently qualified as an RYA powerboat instructor, which should be very helpful to SARA!



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Meet Derrick Williams

Having been an avid outdoorsman for the past forty years, climbing / walking mountains, extreme challenges, canoeing, wild camping and the like, I often had the idea of joining Mountain Rescue. However living an hour away from the nearest of the Brecon Beacon Range, I always thought "by the time I get there, it will be too late".

Three years ago I was surfing the net pondering over the opportunity to offer my voluntary services. I happened to come across the SARA site. My initial thought was "it's all about boats, that's not for me". But then I dug a little deeper. How wrong was I? SARA is the most diverse, totally voluntary search & rescue organisation in the UK and the station is only twenty minutes from my door step! My application went in, I became a member & never looked back.

I requested to join Land Search & Rescue. Being naive of the facts I thought I would just 'rock up' and start searching 'there is nothing to it' - how wrong was I?

The training programme in itself was so detailed, professional, exciting & enjoyable. With forty years previous outdoor experience, done everything, know it all, what can they teach me? Once again how wrong was I?

I learnt so much not only about SAR but the outdoors. The team has such a massive range of experience & skills base, it really is incredible.

The beauty of SARA is that you do what you want to do, you are never forced to carry out anything you feel uncomfortable about. There is so much support around you, there is always someone to help you, the teamwork is phenomenal, you are never alone.

You contribute whatever suits your circumstances.



It's brilliant when people ask me "what did you do last week?" With my response being "I helped save someone's life" how proud it makes me feel to be an ambassador for SARA, to wear the 'badge'.

I am also very proud to have learnt so many new skills since my short time with the organisation, the opportunities are endless. My qualifications to date are:- Deputy Land Search Manager (Beachley), Land Search Technician, Land Party Leader, Swift Water Technician, National Navigation Award Tutor, Outdoor First Aider, Swift Water Technician & Mountain Rescue 4x4 off road driver.

Being proud is an understatement.

Derrick Williams

Boat & Land Exercise

At the end of March the SARA Beachley Team was training in the Lower Wye Valley. The scenario was two girls who had been missing overnight, having last been seen playing in the steep woods along the river bank.

A land search team and a lifeboat were deployed to search for them. They were located, one by each team, close to the Roman Harbour opposite Lancaut. They both had some convincing 'injuries', so the land and boat teams worked together to provide casualty care and then evacuate them both carefully onto the boat. Due to the low tide this required a good degree of teamwork, following which the 'casualties' were taken downstream to safety.

Many thanks to the staff from the Coventry Building Society in Chepstow for being such good casualties!



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Fundraising News

Many thanks to Councillor Nick Penny, Mayor of Coleford, for selecting SARA as one of his two Charities of the Year. It was our pleasure to attend the Mayor's Annual Dinner in Coleford at the Bells Hotel and Country Club, attended by representatives of many local organisations and businesses. This was followed by an auction. We understand that the evening raised over £5,000, in aid of SARA and the Great Oaks Dean Forest Hospice.

Many thanks to everyone who has contributed to the blue token 'Bags of help' collection for SARA at Tesco in Chepstow, and to the collection in Monmouth Waitrose.

'Go Orange' was a new initiative for SARA this March. Pupils at schools across Newport, Chepstow and the Forest of Dean went Orange for SARA, as did the Park Runs at the Forest of Dean Lydney and the Severn Bridge. These raised over £1,500 for SARA! We hope to make this an annual initiative, so we will be Going Orange again in March 2020!



It was also great to see the Brockweir Amateur Dramatic Society at Beachley. They brought with them a cheque for a marvellous £456.29, donating all the profits from the autumn play 'Blithe Spirit' to SARA.

Set up a Direct Debit!

SARA depends on donations. A small monthly donation would help us immensely.

Just email info@sara-rescue.org.uk to request a Direct Debit email. From the link we send you, you can enter your bank details directly into a secure website.

Please don't forget to tick the 'Gift Aid' box!

Please Join Us!

We are always looking for new operational crew members, both as Lifeboat Crew and Land Team Members.

In addition, our Fundraisers help to raise the essential money which is needed to keep the Station operational. Other Specialist Members have skills such as administration and vehicle mechanics, which are essential to keeping the operation going.

All operational team members need to be physically fit; lifeboat crew should ideally live within 15 minutes of Beachley or Malpas, and must be able to swim. Full training is provided - regular attendance during the training course is needed to become operational, and then continuation & progression training can follow.



Could this be you?

For more information contact info@sara-rescue.org.uk

SARA (Severn Area Rescue Association) is a Registered Charity in England & Wales No: 505504
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