

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 2019 SARA conducted 109 different operations.

## SARA News

For SARA, as for everyone else, the early months of 2020 have not been at all as we had expected! Firstly, we had the heavy flooding in February from Storm Dennis, which followed hard on the heels of Storm Ciara, and then in March the Coronavirus, or Covid-19, arrived.

Throughout this period we are proud that we have maintained our core rescue capabilities. We responded to both land search and lifeboat callouts during the flooding period. At the time of writing, we have, so far, responded to 10 callouts during the 6 weeks of lockdown. It's important to emphasise that none of these callouts relate to infringements of the lockdown guidelines - they have all arisen from our 'usual combination' of accidents, misadventures and mental health issues.

During the lockdown, lifeboats have been called out from Beachley and Newport, including to a dog which had been stuck in mud in the Severn and to a search and subsequently, sadly, a body recovery in Newport. We deployed on land search callouts to Cinderford and Upper Rissington (in the east of Gloucestershire), and a search at Berkeley located the missing lady alive and well. In between callouts, three members formed the 'Severn Searchers' and pedalled, cani-crossed and cross-trained through individual marathons on 26 April, raising over £500 for SARA and NHS Charities Together.

Another successful day in April for our Land Search Team was for a missing person search in the Soudley area of the Forest of Dean. Teams from SARA Tewkesbury and Gloucestershire Cave Rescue Group, and a Water Rescue Team from SARA Sharpness joined us, and the Forest of Dean Salvation Army Team provided very welcome refreshments. After several hours of searching, some of which was in pretty complex woodland, the missing lady was located. She was assessed and attended to by several of our Casualty Carers and then carried out to an NHS Ambulance which arrived very quickly.



We had two important visitors in early March. Mark Harper MP visited Beachley again for another very useful meeting, including discussing grants and forthcoming legislation. We also hosted Archie, a very special young man – see separate story inside!

And lastly congratulations to Dave, Ryan and Jerry, who qualified as Lifeboat Helms in February!

### Cymru Kitchens



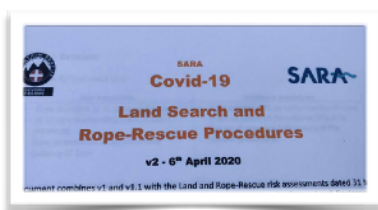
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## Covid-19

March and April were of course dominated by Covid-19. SARA suspended all non-essential training on 12 March, in advance of the main Government announcements, and with it all face-face fundraising activities. At the same time, the sporting and other events for which we provide first aid cover were also cancelled or postponed. However we recognised that we needed to maintain our Search and Rescue capabilities, as we are the only organisation to provide these within our area.

SARA developed a set of procedures to adapt to the changed environment, aiming to minimise mixing of team members as much as possible and to ensure that appropriate PPE is put on and taken off in the correct way.



Mountain Rescue and UK SAR have also produced guidance about dealing with casualties, which we have adopted. One of the key changes has been for us to have a 'Covid Officer' on our callouts – they are there to make sure that the guidelines are followed, since the volunteers are likely to be focused on the rescue tasks.

Like so many other organisations, we have also had to acquire Covid-related PPE and cleaning products. We have bought some commercially, but we are also very grateful to the WCS Group from Gloucester for donating a very useful quantity of PPE, and Silver Circle Distillery in Catbrook for donating hand sanitiser.



## Storm Dennis Floods

SARA was involved in the flooding which followed Storm Dennis for almost three weeks. We had, at the time, 4 flood teams declared to DEFRA but we actually fielded 6 separate teams at the same time on several days. We responded to requests from Hereford & Worcestershire, South Wales and Gloucestershire Fire Services.

By 5 March, SARA had deployed flood teams 29 times. Teams from Sharpness and Upton Stations rescued people from cars. SARA Beachley was involved with the rescue of the lady who has 'trapped in the roof of her car' for 12 hours near Bigsweir Bridge (actually she was standing up on her seat, with her upper body out of the sunroof).



Teams across SARA assisted with evacuations – including around 50 people in Tenbury Wells and from a care home in Whitchurch - as well as providing supplies and food deliveries and searching buildings. The Beachley and Newport Teams were mainly involved with welfare work in the Monmouth area.

During this 3-week period the team also responded to two missing person searches and two lifeboat callouts, many of these involving the same volunteers as the flood response.



## March Lifeboat Shouts

March saw some quite unusual callouts - here is a short summary:

On 7 March we were paged by Milford Haven Coastguard Operations Centre to reports of a dinghy adrift just off Caldicot Flats. SARA Lifeboat 1 'The Jim Hewitt' was launched to what turned out to be a very large life raft. This was recovered and handed over to Chepstow Coastguard to make enquiries as to the owner.



The Unidentified Floating Object

On 16 March SARA Lifeboat 3 was launched to reports of an upturned kayak on the River Wye. This was recovered back to Beachley and again handed over to the Chepstow Coastguard. Congratulations to new helm Jerry on a first shout well executed!

On 21 March a yacht had suffered engine failure and called for assistance with a 'Mayday' message. SARA Lifeboat 1, with her twin 150hp engines, was able to tow her back to Beachley - though it took two hours going against the outgoing 8 knot tide!



The yacht under tow behind SARA Lifeboat 1

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## 4x4 Instructor Course

Just before the lockdown started, we were fortunate to have one of our members attend an MREW off-road 4x4 driving instructor course. This was a 4-day course in Devon which included actually delivering both theory and practical lessons – the content and syllabus is approved by ROSPA and BORDA.



The course covered the functional capability of 4x4 vehicles, loading, drivetrain, terrain assessment and emergency procedures. This ensures that we can deliver a quality instructional course, so that our team members can get the vehicles both to and from the casualty with minimum damage to the vehicles, the crew and the environment.

## Sea Survival Course

In March we also held the first SARA Sea Survival course. This was run at Beachley and also - with the assistance and permission of Chepstow yacht club - at St Pierre Pill for the practical water sessions. The course involved practising the different inflation methods of our lifejackets, learning to enter the water from a height safely, and survival methods and techniques. Following a short swim the crew all had to board SARA Lifeboat 1 from the water un-aided.





## Winter Skills Training

Whilst Storm Dennis was still raging, 5 SARA team members were in Snowdonia for winter skills training. There was no snow, but plenty of very wintry weather to test them! Ogwen Valley Mountain Rescue Organisation again allowed us to use their base in the shadow of Tryfan.

On Saturday the team headed up to Llynau Cerrig-y-Myllt for a morning's micro-navigation. With the storm reducing visibility to <50m, the team's navigation skills were fully stress-tested, as well as their Keela-Kit - both were found up to the task.



By 1300, with conditions deteriorating, the team were off the hill for lunch and a discussion on synoptic charts and anticipation of avalanche risk in mountainous areas. Then it was off to the Climbing Centre for some rope rescue techniques, as well as methods for the recovery of incapacitated climbers.

The next morning, with the weather abated, it was up to Bwlch Tryfan. Here the team was instructed in group management, casualty support and confidence roping, further navigation, contour interpretation and body-belaying, with some useful practice.

We train our crew constantly. This weekend allowed team members to build new skills and develop existing ones in an unfamiliar environment and also enabled crew members from different stations to work together, all of which makes us a more effective team.

We would like to thank Ogwen Valley MRO, and Rich Wells of [Footprint Mountain Adventures](#) for his outstanding instruction.

## Set up a Direct Debit!

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

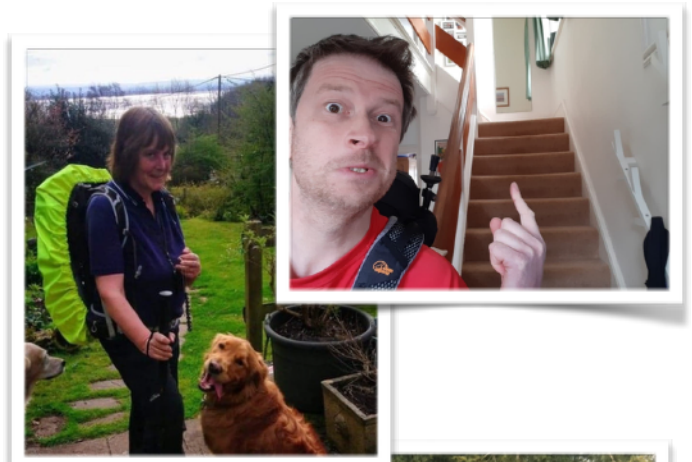
Just email [info@sara-rescue.org.uk](mailto:info@sara-rescue.org.uk) to request a Direct Debit email. From the link we send you, you can enter your bank details directly into a secure website.

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

## Lockdown Diversions

In a bid to stay sane, and maintain some semblance of fitness, some of the team decided to undertake a metaphorical walk up Pen y Fan in the Brecon Beacons. Pen y Fan is 886m above sea level, or is an ascent of 566m from the Storey Arms. Some ascended from sea level, those that took the stairs opted for the height gain from Storey Arms.

All walks were taken from (or within) home and as the daily permitted exercise. If the lockdown goes on much longer who knows what heights may be scaled....?



SARA (Severn Area Rescue Association) is a Registered Charity in England & Wales No: 505504  
Registered Address: The Lifeboat & Rescue Station, Beachley Road, Chepstow NP16 7HH  
[www.sara-rescue.org.uk](http://www.sara-rescue.org.uk).

## Auf Wiedersehen Lisa!

At the start of May we sadly had to say farewell to our fantastic team member Lisa, as she is moving back to Germany.

Lisa joined our land search team in 2018 and has been on a lot of the callouts since then (including one in Chipping Camden when her car broke down on the way home, leaving her stuck on the M4 for hours!).

We will miss her smile and enthusiasm and wish her all the best!



## Archie's Lifeboat Day!

Archie is a 13-year-old boy from Bristol, who had his wish granted in March, thanks to Rays of Sunshine, ([www.raysofsunshine.org.uk](http://www.raysofsunshine.org.uk)).

Archie was diagnosed at birth with Renal Failure, which affects the kidneys and can lead to kidney failure. Sadly, this has meant the 13-year-old has been in and out hospital since he was born. He has had to endure countless operations, takes daily medication and must partake in regular physio. His assessment and treatment is ongoing, but Archie has always been brave and strong.



## Local Heroes!

Many thanks to the team at [Magor Motors](#) for repairing our Incident Support Unit (ISU). They replaced the front and rear panels, and the inner wheel arches, which were all getting rather rusty, and then repainted much of the vehicle sides. She looks amazing and it has certainly given her a new lease of life!

[The Optical People](#) in Chepstow raised an amazing £211 for SARA in their Easter Raffle, despite the challenging situation in force!



Thanks also to the Co-op Caldicot for having SARA as their chosen Community Fund this year. We've just received the first donation, which is very welcome.

Archie's greatest wish was to be part of a search and rescue team for the day and it took place at our Beachley Lifeboat Station. We organised for him and his Gramps (grandad) to go along on an exclusive training session. Archie got to wear all the special equipment and go out with the team to take part in lifeboat training. After his wish, his mum Jemma, said: "In his words, it was the 'best day ever!' Thank you again for all you have done for Archie."

## Please Join Us!

We are always looking for new members, as Lifeboat Crew, Land Team Members and as support staff. The 2020 Training intake has been postponed, but we will start it as soon as we can, hang in there everyone!!

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