

North West Mountain Rescue Team

ANNUAL REPORT 2023-24

(period covering 1 Apr 2023 – 31 March 2024)



*Winter Training
Cuilcagh Mountain Co Fermanagh*

Northern Ireland Charity No 100059

Name of Charity:

North West Mountain Rescue Team

Registered Charity Number:

NIC 100059

Contact Details:

Public address: 62 Killee Road, Coa, Ballinamallard, Co. Fermanagh BT94 2FS

Telephone number: 079 1959 6487

Email: secretary@nwmrt.org

Website: www.nwmrt.org

Trustees 2023-24:

Mr S. Forrest, Ms P. Ellis, Mr K. Thompson, Ms O. Cosgrove, Mr D. Tyson, Ms M. Martin, Mr A. Alderdice, Mr J. Irwin (resigned), Mr D. Faulkner (resigned)

Appointment of Trustees:

A trustee cannot be appointed by any person or body of persons within the charity but can only be appointed at any general meeting of the charity by majority vote and when a quorum is present.

Governance:

The organisation is a charity unincorporated association governed by a constitution that was formally adopted at the annual general meeting on 2 May 2018, and as amended on 11 August 2018, 20 February 2022 and 28 April 2024.

Purposes:

1. To save life and prevent injury in remote, hostile, and mountainous environments.
2. To educate the public on hazards in mountains and offer practical advice to reduce risks.
3. To promote physical and mental health, fitness, and wellbeing of communities through outdoor activities, particularly in upland and mountainous areas.
4. To promote environmental protection, particularly in upland and mountainous areas.
5. To relieve the suffering of animals in remote, hostile, and mountainous environments.

Public Benefit Requirements:

The trustees have had regard to the public benefit requirement as defined in the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 (as amended).

SUMMARY OF EVENTS, ACTIVITIES AND MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS**Team Name Change**

The 2023/24 year started with the significant issue of the team name change. This resulted in a leadership change for the team following the Annual General meeting on 25 May. Whilst the leadership structure remained unchanged (Trustees and Team Officers) there were a lot of new members undertaking roles within the team. Of most significance was the appointment of 6 new Trustees, from 9, to oversee the governance and strategic direction of the Charity.

This leadership change came about following the impact of the team name issue and the need to take steps to avoid potential legal action from another MRT. Needless to say, that the team name change was ill-judged and misinformed that also impacted negatively on the team internally as well as creating interventions from MRI and the Charity Commission.

The new Trustees prioritised the team name change and through an agreed 'Team Name Change Roadmap' process with the Charity Commission and MRI. This process resulted in the team deciding to revert to the original team name of North West Mountain Rescue Team. This name was subsequently formally accepted by the Charity Commission on 3 November 2023.

The Team has now drawn a clear line under this issue and members are expected to refocus our energies on more significant and pressing issues.

Team Rebuild

The impact of this matter was far reaching within the team and the Trustees in recognising the fallout, embarked on a second phase 'Team Rebuild' in which the matter of morale and mediation was the priority issues. To assist this process, MRI kindly offered the services of David Polley (MRI Executive Officer) who undertook mediation sessions with members and hosted a successful Team Building Day on 22 October 2023. The team was also delighted to have the support of Hanna Shields on the day to deliver an inspirational presentation and discussion on teamwork. Although it may be too early to state that a successful outcome was achieved, the process has been well received and is moving the team forward in the right direction.

The out workings of the Team Building day and the mediation process has now identified the priority issues to be addressed within the team. These include:

- Call Outs – addressing the low and downward trend in numbers received;
- Charity (Team) Constitution – review to create a better balance of section members in leadership positions;
- Membership Standards – review of requirements including statutory Access NI checks;
- Partnerships – establishing better inter- SAR team and statutory authority working.



Team Day at An Carn, Maghera – 22 October 2023

Team Leadership and Matters

The team recognised 2023/24 as essentially a year of rebuilding trust and confidence within team members. This was also recognised by Mountain Rescue Ireland (MRI) who in a welcomed demonstration of support and confidence, proposed that the MRI annual meeting (MRIAM) weekend was to be organised and hosted by the team.

Mountain Rescue Ireland Annual Meet 2024 (MRIAM24)

The major training / event highlight of the year was the hosting of MRIAM24 in Gortatole, Co. Fermanagh over the weekend of 1-3 March.

This event saw 31 attendees from 11 MRI / SAR teams from across the island of Ireland attend a series of presentations and talks. Notable presentations were made by renowned guest speakers Hanna Shields (Mountaineer and International athlete) and Timm Fogg (Caver and 'Planet Earth' film rigger).

The event also extended to and included an invitation to equipment and kit suppliers which stimulated some very interesting conversations and exchanges of ideas for the member and teams present.

The MRI AGM was also hosted as part of this event and took place immediately following the conclusion of the annual meet programme on Sunday 3 March.

This event was regarded as success based on the formal feedback from attendees and MRI.



MRIAM24 attendees at Marble Arch Caves Co. Fermanagh 1-3 March 2024

Membership Standards and Safeguarding

Access NI Checks

Following an instruction from the Dept of Justice (DOJ), Northern Ireland Search and Rescue (NISAR) practitioners group, a mandatory requirement was made for VSARs to undertake Enhanced Access NI checks on those volunteers engaging with Vulnerable Adults and Young People. This is also a requirement for Charity Commission compliance as a registered charity and also specifically noted as a condition on the DoJ grant funding to VSARs.

The team commenced and completed this process by engaging with other VSAR teams and utilising an 'Umbrella Body', (Lagan Search and Rescue) to assist with the formal application process.

A review was undertaken in early 2024 of membership standards which included a review of requirements including the statutory Access NI checks. This resulted in a new comprehensive annual membership application 'pack' which included a Members Charter and Standards, Drivers Declaration and Access NI checks. This was implemented through the team annual membership application process in advance of the 2024 team AGM in April.

Team Operations and Training

Despite the distraction of the team name challenge, team operations and training continued with the following main events:

Inter Team Training

The team organised a major inter agency training weekend on 22-23 April 2023 with an exercise based in and around Lough Erne. This event involved 25 attendees over the 2 days and involved water and island search along with casualty recovery from water. This was an opportunity for the team's recently trained and equipped Swift Water Rescue team

to work alongside water based SAR teams. This exercise demonstrated the team's further development in the service provided and the ability to work alongside other teams in partnership.

Teams and services that attended included: Sligo Leitrim MRT, Moffat MRT (Scotland), PSNI (Boat Unit) NIAS, RNLI, NI Fire and Rescue Service.



Teams preparing for island and lough shore searches – Lough Erne and Devenish Island



Team extracting casualty from Devenish Island using PSNI RIB

South West Acute Hospital Christmas Visit

The annual SWAH Children's Hospital visit took place on Tuesday 19 December. This annual event was a great opportunity of the team to visit sick children and offer a ray of sunshine in the darkest of months and at Christmas time.



SWAH Santa and Helpers (plus Grinch) visit December 2023

Colebrook 5k Fun Run

The team organised a 5k family fun run on 27 January 2024 at the Colebrooke Estate in Co. Fermanagh. The event attracted over 90 participants and raised £1,826 for team funds.

The team would like to place on record a thanks to Lord Brookeborough who granted permission for the use of the estate and his support in the use of various facilities on the day of the event.



Equipment and Vehicles

The team did not procure any new vehicles or undertake significant investment in new equipment in 2023 /24. The most significant investment in equipment was the procurement of a water rescue sled at £2,218.

The team however recognised that the current level of vehicles (9) was not sustainable and that decisions would have to be taken to rationalise the number to ensure a more efficient operating service.

Fundraising and Recruitment

Fundraising for the year was down on the previous year, however 8 fundraising events including street collections and 5km runs were undertaken. We continued to apply for training and equipment grants with success from DEARA funding. The Department of Justice annual grant again proved vital in sustaining the essential finance to run the team.

The team membership varied across the 2023-24 year however there were 44 active members identified.

Financial Position

A review of the charity's financial position at the end of the year is attached and was conducted by the independent examiner Martin Mc Guigan, 4 Drumlin Heights, Enniskillen, Co. Fermanagh, BT74 7NR. A copy of the Independent Examiners Report is appended (Annex A)

Fixed Asset Register

All equipment is allocated a life of three, six or nine years and straight-line depreciation applied using a monthly calculation to give an accurate value for all equipment held. Work continues in marking and registering all equipment electronically to improve accountability and replacement programmes. A copy of the Statement of Assets and Liabilities has not been completed for 2023-24, however the team intends to complete this Register for forthcoming years.

Incidents

The team was involved in 24 incidents in 2023-24.

The number of incidents increased 26% from 19 to 24 from the previous reporting period with a total 122 hours logged in response to these incidents.

A significant incident of note was a request to assist Sligo Leitrim MRT in the period 9-11 July 2023. This call -out was to assist the Sligo Leitrim Mountain Rescue Team in the search for a vulnerable missing person. A total of 37 members attended over the 3 day period and was another example of good inter-team working and the importance of supporting a sister Mountain Rescue Ireland (MRI) team. It also fulfils a team objective to forge greater working partnerships with other SARs and MRTs when the need arises.

Exercises and Events

Total Training Hours (2017 -2024)

Year	Trg & Exs	Hours	Av Members
2023-24	167	5,173	44
2022-23	108	5,392	26
2021-22	108	7,414	11
2020-21	52	1,688	8
2019-20	105	5,652	10
2018-19	102	4,542	17
2017-18	115	6,633	17

There were 85 exercises and 82 events in 23/24 with 5,173 total hours spend by 44 active members.

The team regards events as a very important engagement and interaction with our community. Some events of note were demonstrations to a range of groups including scouts and young farmers groups as well as children's hospital Christmas visits. Events are also an opportunity to promote the team as well as to educate and raise awareness of our role in the community and safety in the outdoors.

Other events included meetings of working groups and committees, administration, equipment inspections, and grant applications.

Approved by trustees on 30 January 2024 and signed on their behalf by Stephen Forrest
Chair and Trustee



Stephen Forrest

Chairperson North West Mountain Rescue Team