

# AWAY FIND



50 YEARS OF SEARCH DOGS IN ENGLAND

## Celebrating 50 years of Search and Rescue Dogs in England





# AWAY FIND

FIFTY YEARS OF SEARCH DOGS IN ENGLAND

**Dedicated to the memory of our President,  
Neville Sharp**

The Search and Rescue Dog Association, England,  
now known as Mountain Rescue Search Dogs England.

Written and compiled by Neville Sharp BEM MSc. and Chris Sherwin

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# PRESIDENT OF MRSDE NEVILLE SHARP



It is my pleasure to write this report to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Mountain Rescue Search Dogs England (MRSDE).

In the early 1970's, I offered my services to the association as a 'dogsbody' in the belief that helping to train a search dog might subsequently lead to the saving of life on the fells and in the mountains. The sheer exuberance of being found by an excited and exhilarated search dog must be beyond words if you are the casualty.

I have witnessed at first hand the countless hours of commitment and dedication given by each and every handler and their dog. They train in all weathers, day and night, always knowing that when the call for help is made, that together with their dog, they could be the last hope of a missing person being found alive.

From the beginning, our basic dog training skills have changed very little. We now have a more structured and planned training programme designed to accommodate all handlers and their dogs.

The introduction of new technology over the years has ensured that handlers have up to date equipment and good clothing. Similarly, dogs now have identity search jackets with light attachments for working in the dark. This enables the handler to see their dog, maintain contact and direct the dog both through the day and at night.

We must not forget the many volunteers who have contributed in their role as a dogsbody to ensure our training is successful and worthwhile. They are also now better equipped with outdoor clothing and 'bivvi bags' to ensure good protection from the elements. This is a vocation which stretches the limits when the weather is inclement and is no place for the faint hearted.





Neville and Gayle pause to assess the next search area, 1990s

From those early days we have learned and developed our standards of assessment. The training of handlers and dogs now uses some of the best equipment available for mapping, navigation and radio communications. The technology may have changed but the principles of training are the same. At the start it was also recognised that only qualified members of a Mountain Rescue team would have the skills and competence to undertake this work. Without good mountain skills, both in navigation and first aid, it would without doubt be less effective, and at times dangerous for inexperienced members to be deployed on to the hills and mountains in all weathers, day or night.

In changing times the police service now relies more on the support of Mountain Rescue Search Dogs in urban search work. The search for a missing person in an urban environment does not change a dog's perception - a search is a search - and that commitment to work is never ending.

The service of the handlers and dogs has been remarkable.

Neville Sharp BEM, MSc.

# CHAIRMAN OF MRSDE DAVID WARDEN



Within this brief historic record of SARDA England/ MRSDE there is a section on the earliest days of Mountain Rescue Search Dogs in Great Britain, starting in 1964.

My first awareness of Mountain Rescue Search Dogs came about in 1974 when, having just become involved in mountain rescue, I bought a copy of the International Mountain Rescue Handbook, which was the first edition, published in 1972. The author was, of course, our founder Hamish MacInnes. A section of the book is devoted to search dogs and it's notable that, whilst things have evolved since then, the groundwork had been laid and the principles established in those early few years. SARDA had been formed only seven years before, and SARDA England only one year before the book was published. One wonders if those early handlers doubtless experimenting with training methods, would have expected the techniques and framework which they developed still to be in use over 50 years later.

In the 50 years since our formation, 238 handlers and 316 dogs have passed assessment and have played their part in thousands of callouts with 'finds' being in the hundreds, many of those being life-saving. Those graded dogs and handlers have only been able to succeed as the result of a huge support system which includes countless dogsbodies, instructors, assessors, supporters, sundry walkers, landowners, farmers, gamekeepers, sponsors and donors, to all of whom we're exceedingly grateful.

The whole organisation exists, of course, because of the very special qualities of search dogs which never cease to impress those who handle them or get found by them. The sense of smell is obviously the dog's main attribute but its almost intuitive ability to learn the task and deliver the result is no less impressive. However, that doesn't happen overnight, and requires tremendous effort and commitment from the handler over about two years and for the duration of the dog's working life, to ensure that the dog has every opportunity to learn and develop. We have much to be thankful for in the history of our organisation, but the one thing above all is the privilege of working with such smart animals.

## PATRON OF MRSDE ALAN HINKES OBE



Alan is an accomplished Himalayan mountaineer based in northern England who still enjoys rock climbing and fell walking in his local hills. He is the first Briton to climb all fourteen 8000 metre peaks including Everest and K2. Alan, an Ambassador for Mountain Rescue, accepted the same role for MRSDE in 2017 and then became the Patron in 2021.

‘As a valuable part of search and rescue, dogs are important for finding casualties in any type of terrain, especially remote locations. These dogs are highly trained to efficiently and quickly locate missing people or casualties, which can mean saving a life.’

Alan often helps with training as a ‘dogsboddy’ which can involve hiding in the fells or other remote areas such as forest to allow search dogs to find him.

## FOUNDER OF SARDA DR. HAMISH MACINNES OBE BEM



As the writing of this booklet was almost complete our previous patron Dr. Hamish MacInnes passed away peacefully at home in his beloved Glencoe. Hamish had dedicated his whole life to the mountains, climbing, exploring, pioneering rescue equipment and techniques used all over the world to this day. He initiated the use of search dogs in the UK. He would always talk about his past exploits in an unseemly, nonchalant way! Hamish became our patron in 2008 and contributed to its yearbooks. He never lost his interest in hearing about the progress of the dog teams and their endeavours.

He was known as the ‘Fox of Glencoe’ and ‘Father of Scottish Mountain Rescue’. He founded the Glencoe Mountain Rescue Team (in 1961), SARDA, the Search and Rescue Dog Association (in 1965), and with Eric Langmuir the Scottish Avalanche Information Service. All are legacies which still thrive.



Hamish with Walter Elliot in 2020, both founder members of Glencoe MRT and Sarda

In autumn 2020 Hamish wrote: 'As I am now into my 10th decade (having celebrated my 90th birthday in the July) I am reminded of a long forgotten event that was 'in fact' an initiator to the founding of SARDA in the UK.

A climber was overdue and had gone out in the Mamores. This as it happened corresponded timewise with a massive avalanche being reported coming down Steall Gully in Glen Nevis. I suspected the two incidents might be connected, so I went up with my dog Rangi to explore the upper gully, while Dr. Catherine MacInnes with our dog, Tiki, would search the area of avalanche debris below.

Let me digress here for a moment: Rangi and Tiki were the first 2 search and rescue dogs in Great Britain. I had become very interested during my war service in Austria in the use of dogs for S&R and in avalanches, and thereafter took a course in Switzerland which opened my eyes to the tremendous capabilities a well-trained dog brought to searches in mountain rescue.

Back to my story: I was well up the gully with Rangi just beside me - the gully rearing up to near vertical above me. I could see the gully up to the top, it had been swept completely clean of snow, down to bed-rock and blue ice - not a patch of snow left in it. I assessed the situation: there was little chance of any further threat of avalanche here, but I also knew there was almost nil chance of finding a victim in this location. Rangi and I were about to move lower down when we heard this tremendous 'c-r-a-c-k'.

We could never have known, but above us on the left was a wee subsidiary gully - perhaps only a metre or a metre and a half wide. Suddenly the gully let loose a full force avalanche which hit Rangi, but in that instant I had the good fortune of climbing up the rock face just aside me. I narrowly escaped the avalanche's clutches, but Rangi was swept away and fully buried. Searching with Tiki to try and locate my dog, there was not a great deal of time before Tiki found Rangi and he was recovered from the deep snow. Rangi was alive but paralyzed with a broken spine. I picked up the dog in my arms and carried him down to the base of the gully. There was nothing to be done for him but to put him out of his misery. He had been a wonderful dog.

In so many ways Rangi proved to be the spark for SARDA, and now as I head off into my own sunset, it is gratifying to know I leave SARDA in such capable and competent hands. I wish you all the very best.'



# HOW WE CAME ABOUT AND WHAT WE DO

In December 1964 a training course with Mountain Rescue Members from throughout the UK was held in Glencoe. Encouraged by this course, and the potential shown by the dogs, a meeting was held in May 1965 and SARDA was hatched and started to grow.

SARDA initially covered the whole of the United Kingdom but as the strength of the membership grew it was decided to split into three national regions. In 1971 the UK group was devolved into the Scottish, English and Welsh associations. Further developments led to the modern day, with the present structure of SARDA Scotland, SARDA Southern Scotland, Lake District Mountain Rescue Search Dogs, Mountain Rescue Search Dogs England, SARDA Wales, SARDA South Wales, SARDA Isle of Man, SARDA Ireland North and SARDA Ireland South.

Mountain Rescue Search Dogs England is a member of Mountain Rescue England and Wales and in 2021 we celebrate 50 years of involvement in the search and rescue of those in need of assistance wherever required.

We provide search and rescue dog teams for 6 of the 9 Mountain Rescue regions in England and Wales. Mountain Rescue team members can apply to train a search and rescue dog with us and if accepted, there is a rigorous programme that develops both dog and handler into an effective search team. The culmination of training is a demanding 3 day assessment on steep, mountainous terrain typically in the Lake District or The Brecon Beacons. Once graded, handlers continue to develop through operational experience and an upgrade process.

It does take a special kind of person to become a search dog handler and an even more exceptional dog to become a Mountain Rescue search dog. There are approximately 1800 Mountain Rescue volunteers in England and Wales of which about 50 are graded search dog handlers, with approximately 40 in-training, which equates to about 5% of the total.



Search dog Meg

## >> DOGFACT

There are about 8.5 million dogs thought to be in the UK of which 0.001% are Search and Rescue dogs so you can understand how special they really are!



## EARLY DAYS



Hamish with Rang and Tiki

The use of dogs for search purposes goes back many years. In the 17th century dogs were used to break trails in deep snow in Switzerland and records reveal that a dog named Barry saved forty lives during his lifetime. During the First World War dogs were used by the Red Cross to locate the injured on the battlefield at night and in lulls in the fighting. In the Second World War dogs were used to locate casualties buried by the blitz.

The first experimental work carried out with mountain search dogs in this country was inspired by Hamish MacInnes. Much of his National Service was served in the Austrian Tyrol where he met mountain guide Hans Spielman. Hans had two dogs which, although not specifically trained for search work, had a natural flair to detect human scent under snow and elsewhere. Hamish was inspired by these dogs and returning to Glencoe, acquired a German Shepherd dog of his own called Tiki in the early 1960's.

Tiki was joined by a second dog called Rang. Hamish experimented with both these dogs until he was fortunate enough to secure funding from the British Red Cross to attend an avalanche dog training course in Switzerland.



Returning again Hamish saw that more and more people were taking to the mountains in their leisure time and in consequence there were more incidents of walkers and climbers being reported lost or in difficulty. It was common practice at this time for local farmers, police officers, shepherds and game keepers to voluntarily go out and assist such people. A meeting was called with interested parties which included Sandy Seabrook (army sergeant), Kenny McKenzie (the local police officer) and Walter and Willie Elliot (local farmers). Hamish had become more convinced that dogs could be trained to undertake mountain search work and so, together with his wife Catherine, issued an invitation to all the Police Forces in the UK. This invite was to send a representative to the course in Glencoe and witness the pioneering work being undertaken by search dogs, primarily in the mountains. On the 14th December 1964, the inaugural 'get together' to implement years of ideas and early experimental training was held. This training was a success and the rest, as they say, is history!



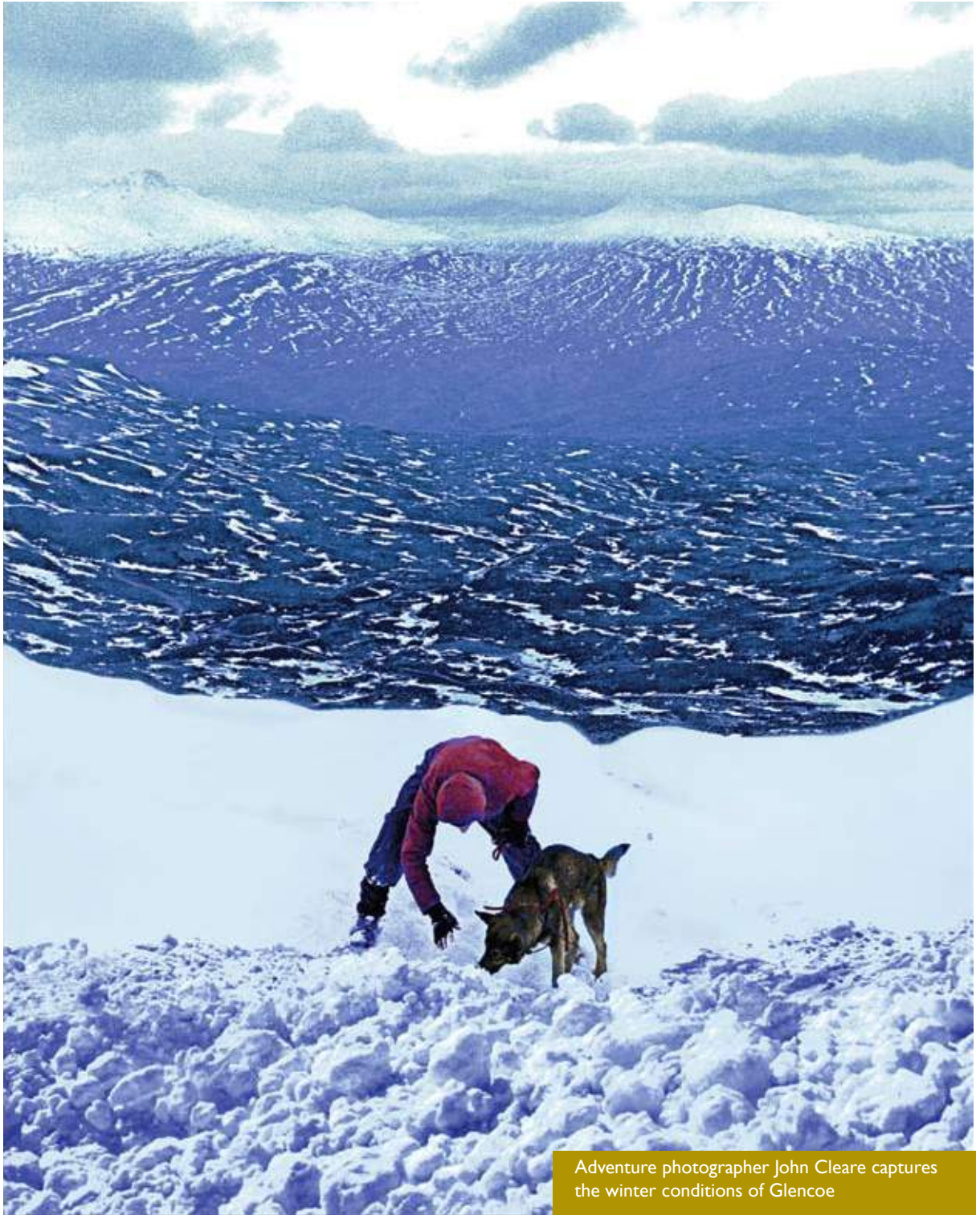


The photograph above shows Sergeant Les Bray and Hughean Findley at the first training course organised by Hamish McInnes and Kenny McKenzie. Sergeant Bray was at that time in charge of the Dog Section in the West Riding Police. Our President Neville Sharp joined that Dog Section in 1966



A sequence of early days images from Glencoe taken by John Cleare. Catherine MacInnes features above and right





Adventure photographer John Cleare captures the winter conditions of Glencoe



# BEGINNINGS OF THE ORGANISATION



The first training course

After that first meeting at Hamish's cottage in Glencoe on 28th May 1965 the feeling between those present was that a training organisation should be formed to develop and provide Mountain Rescue Search Dogs to support rescue teams throughout the UK. The main objectives would be:



To develop the skills and impart knowledge to train such dogs



To raise and secure funds to support such a venture.

Whilst all rescue teams throughout the UK at this time may well have thought that anyone could train a dog for this purpose, it was recognised that there should be some common standards and continuity in the process. All searches undertaken by the police ensure that they have overall command and that any agency deployed in a search should have the best both in training and experience to provide the ultimate resource available. This applies even more so in a mountain environment.

SARDA was born, ground rules and protocols were developed, leading to a disciplined group of mountaineers with trained dogs working in support of the police in both inclement weather and hostile environments. SARDA would be a training organisation designed to train dogs for mountain rescue work and remains so to this day.

50 YEARS OF SEARCH DOGS IN ENGLAND

## >> DOGFACT

At the end of the decade the UK nations had built up a solid dog-team resource to offer:

|          |         |
|----------|---------|
| SCOTLAND | 25 DOGS |
| ENGLAND  | 10 DOGS |
| WALES    | 7 DOGS  |

BEGINNINGS

## THE FIRST DECADE



Ian Brown led to the casualty by Rosco



Mike Hammond & Tess

The formation of SARDA England took place in late 1971 following the separation of SARDA Scotland and SARDA Wales. At this time there were twenty five handlers in Scotland and eight in Wales. England had twelve handlers who were resident and operational in the newly designated area to be known as SARDA England.

The inaugural meeting was not held until 12th March 1972 at Edale in Derbyshire. Members present at this meeting were:

|              |                |            |               |
|--------------|----------------|------------|---------------|
| Mike Hammond | Kenny McKenzie | D. Milburn | Glenys Manley |
| Jim Coyle    | Ken Saxby      | W. Mekie   | (daughter of  |
| M. Crook     | Geoff Reid     | J. Manley  | Roy Marshall) |

Mike Hammond remained a leading figure in the association and his wife, also a handler, took on the role of treasurer. Roy Marshall, who could not attend the meeting, had offered his services as secretary and was duly appointed. Roy was a police dog training instructor in the West Yorkshire Police at Wakefield. He had attended courses in Glencoe in the early development of SARDA.

Another key player was Geoff Reid who later became the secretary and was a driving force in the organisation. In 1973 Geoff obtained a Winston Churchill Fellowship award allowing him to visit Europe and Scandinavia to research dog training in those countries. It was during these visits that he observed dogs wearing high visibility dog coats and recognised how important this was. Not only could the handler see his dog working more easily, but it also gave the search dog an identity. He developed this idea on his return, attracting much interest. He was later presented a Silver Award by the Prince of Wales for his commitment and work. At this time it was considered that the most suitable breeds of dog to train were German Shepherds or Border Collies. Labradors, large Terriers, Dobermans and an Irish Setter had also been used with success. January 1973 saw the first training course for SARDA England run in the Peak District in April, followed by one in November at Thirlspot in the English Lake District.



Geoff Reid



Training in Buttermere circa 1971

The first task was to teach dogs to run out to a distance of at least fifty yards, show interest in hunting and locating body scent from the person hiding. They were then signed up as a potential recruit.







Ken Saxby circa 1973

Shortly after this introductory period Keswick Mountain Rescue Team would test new members in mountaineering skills including navigation work. Part of the training included a 'bivvi night' on the fells. This eventually brought about a decision that aspirant Mountain Rescue Search Dog handlers had to qualify as a full rescue team member with the required skills first, before applying to join.

In reality, this meant that at the commencement of training, they were competent mountaineers with first aid training, navigation and planning skills when deployed on a search. Training always remained a priority although notes from the minutes of a meeting at that time indicated that there were complaints about spending £700 of total assets of only £1300 on a training course.

In 1972 Ken Saxby trained a new dog and later took the position as training officer in 1977. Ken was a dedicated and quiet, unassuming man with a sound understanding of dogs. His quiet disposition helped many handlers overcome issues with their dogs. He always had time for a 'quiet word or chat' paving the way forward for the less experienced. Standards for qualification to be a search dog were at that time listed as A, B, and C. It is a nostalgic reminder that they were complicated and difficult. The grades were:

- A10-A6 Grade      A chance to take part in an assessment.
- A5-A1 Grade      Allowed to take part in a callout but accompanied.

- B Grade      On the callout list.
- C Grade      Highest  
(but only allowed to take this test if they had actually made an Operational 'find').





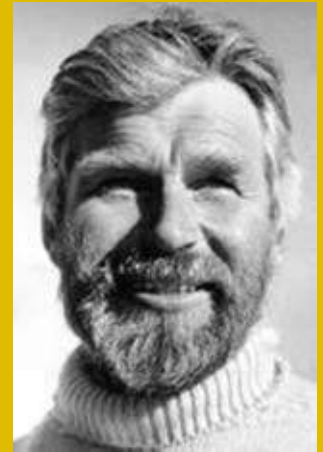
The first person to be invited as president in 1973-1976 was Sir Vivian Ernest Fuchs FRS. He was an English explorer whose expeditionary team completed the first overland crossing of Antarctica in 1958.

Educating rescue teams and the police that there was a place for highly trained dogs to assist in finding missing people, primarily in wild and open country, was a continuing process. Following on from some outstanding achievements more interest was shown and protocol was written and circulated to interested parties. It became clear that by fast deployment and the capability to work in the dark, lives could be saved.

There was a reluctance in the first instance to request and deploy dogs, which would give the best chance of success. Quite often dogs were requested later as time extended in the search scenario.

The 1974 annual report records that there had been three successful and outstanding 'finds' on missing people and that there were now 22 certified search dogs. It is also noted that Black's of Greenock had donated wind-proof anoraks to each handler and that Tupperware had donated plastic boxes for first aid kits. This complemented other kit issued in the form of a Whillans rucksack, dog jacket and flares. Also at this time Burndept Electronic Ltd donated both UHF and VHF radios which, with the four purchased by the association, provided a much needed communication network on operational searches.

During this decade Mountain Rescue teams had also built a good relationship with the RAF rescue helicopter squadron. The training now included search dogs and allowed rapid deployment in extreme situations, particularly in the mountains.



Sir Ernest Fuchs



Geoff Reid in new anorak and Cass training with the RAF





The original novice shield



Sir Chris Bonington



Malcolm Grindrod with Jan

1974 saw the introduction of an award in the form of a shield to be awarded to any dog and handler showing an impressive performance at Novice grade. This award is still presented today, requiring a second shield. It is now restricted to new handlers with their first dog.

With the progress of time, it had now become common practice to have an annual assessment of dogs and handlers. In 1975 the course was held at Hassness, near Buttermere where the Ramblers Association allowed the course members to use their facilities free of charge.

The following year saw the first of many successful courses, with the annual assessment being held at the Crow Park Hotel, Keswick. The hotel owner, Dave Langford, who qualified as a search dog handler in 1976 and therefore understood the importance of continuity with training, was happy to support the association. Thirty five dogs were now successfully graded and operational.

Sir Chris Bonington, CVO, CBE, DL was invited to become president to the association and undertook this role from 1976-79. He was an acclaimed mountaineer leading many expeditions to the Himalayas, including four to Mount Everest.

In 1979 Malcolm Grindrod took over the role as training officer and the grading system was changed to two grades:

**Novice Search Dog** to qualify for inclusion on the call-out list and engage in operational work. A further upgrade assessment to be called a **Search Dog** to show that the team had consolidated its training, and maintained its standards. Together with operational experience this test was to be undertaken within two years.

The first standards of the association were written and marking sheets were introduced for assessments. It was now recognised that each January, in winter conditions in the mountains, there would be an assessment course to test and grade dogs.

In 1979, records indicate that there were the following operational search dogs  
[LAKES 14](#) [PEAK DISTRICT 5](#) [NORTH EAST 5](#) [SOUTH PENNINES 4](#)  
 There were none in the South West region covering Dartmoor and Exmoor and it would be 1986 before the association expanded to this area.

The organisation was growing steadily, missing people had been found and public awareness was increasing. Averaging between 30-40 call outs each year, 53 new dog teams were trained during the 1970's. Balanced by the dogs which retired, the number of dogs on the call-out list throughout this period averaged around 25.

It is noted that at this time handlers like many Mountain Rescue team members came from a variety of backgrounds: from shop keepers, store workers and office work to those working for the emergency services, national parks or outdoor pursuits delivery. There was a common commitment to saving lives in an environment which each and every one had a love for.



Sarda handler badges from the 1970s



**SARDA CHAIRMAN**  
 1972-1973 A.S.Pigott  
 1974-1976 Noel Kirkman  
 1977-1980 Robin Scott

Left: 'Operational in the Highlands' by John Cleare

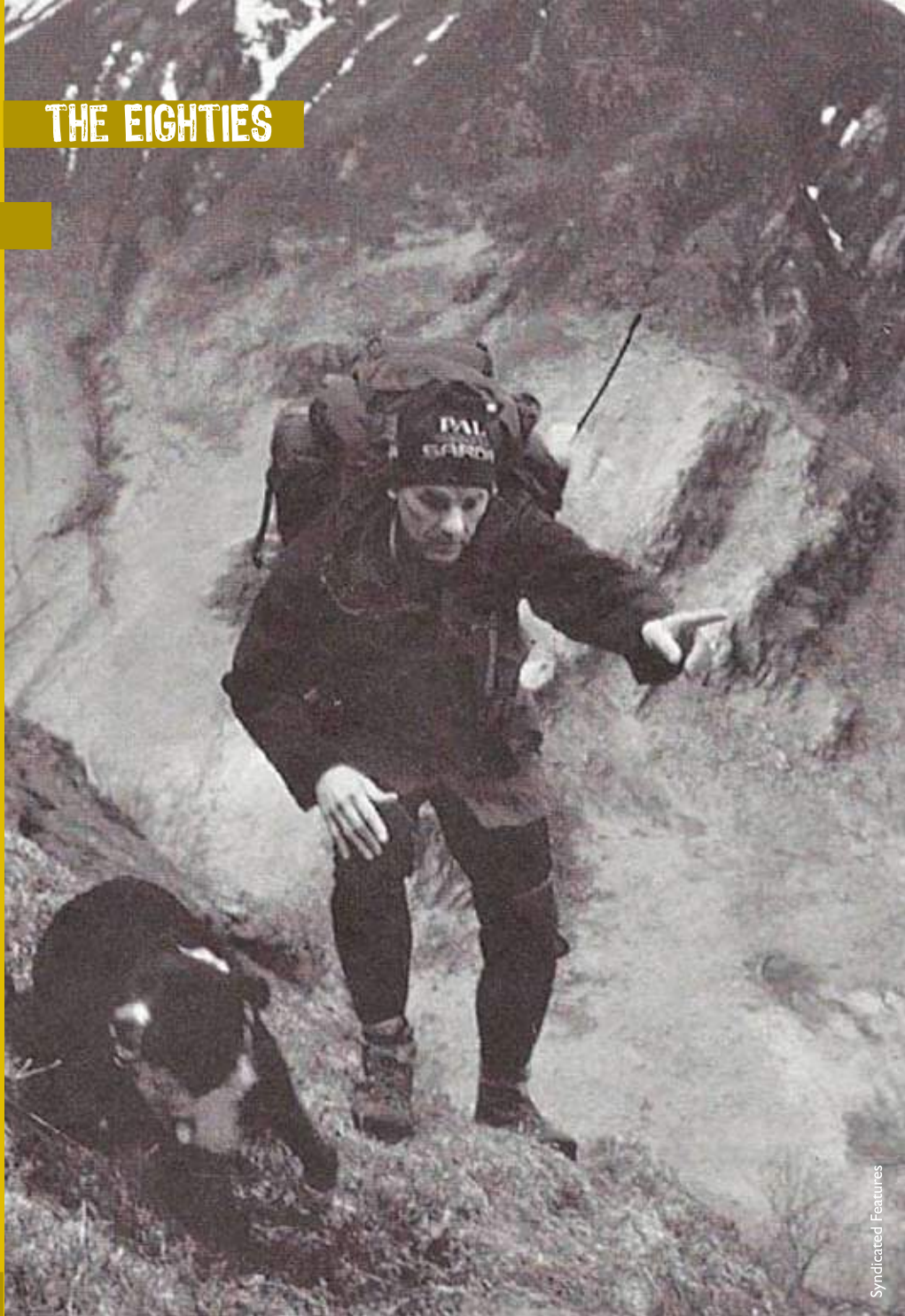


# 1980s

## THE EIGHTIES



Dave Riley and search dog Loch



Syndicated Features

The 1980's saw many changes which proved to be a demanding time for the association. This was certainly a game-changing decade.

50 YEARS OF SEARCH DOGS IN ENGLAND



THE EIGHTIES

A strong team of position holders in chairman, training officer, and the committee started to lay firm foundations, both in training and assessments. Peter Durst had become chairman in 1981 together with Malcolm Grindrod as training officer. Many handlers owe a debt of gratitude to Malcolm for his willingness and enthusiasm to help other handlers and streamline the training programme leading to a much improved assessment system.

Peter was passionate about the work of SARDA. He worked tirelessly to bring it all together. He was responsible for introducing marking sheets and the early rules and standards of the association. At the start of this period the confidence among rescue teams to deploy dogs at searches was only 20%. As the decade progressed this level of deployment was increased to 85% resulting in some excellent 'finds'.

Sid Cross, a renowned Lakeland mountaineer became president of SARDA England in 1980 and held this role for 18 years. Sid was a founder member of the Langdale Fell Rescue Team which later amalgamated with Ambleside Mountain Rescue Team, where he was team leader from 1973 to 1975,

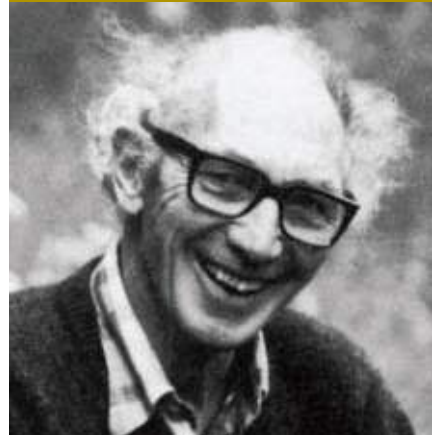
Neville Sharp, was a Police Sergeant Dog Handler in West Yorkshire and appointed honorary training advisor to the association. Many handlers were keen to share his knowledge and expertise. His introduction of control work and obedience was seen by some as unnecessary, but time would show how important this really is, when starting to train a dog. Close working with Ken Saxby and Dave Riley introduced the early element of bonding between dog and handler extending training into everyday life. Young dogs need guidance to learn right from wrong. Correct praise, at the right time, combined with reward and encouraging drive teaches the dog what is required from it. The question always asked was 'has the dog got the speed and capacity to undertake the job'?

It became apparent that whilst the dogs were very good at running and hunting the handlers had very little control over the dogs. The introduction of directional control, while still maintaining the dog's natural instinct, was vital in a search. Just how dogs would interact with their handlers and how they would indicate they had found a missing person or casualty also needed some attention.



Above: Malcom Grindrod

Below: Sid Cross



Neville and Dave Riley discuss tactics in the lakes





Top: Neville Sharp and  
Charlie Relph, stock testing

Bottom: Ian 'Kip' Brown & Troop

Dogs in the early days were taught to remain with the casualty and simply 'bark'. If dog and handler became separated in difficult terrain or darkness the handler could lose contact with the dog. It was essential that the dog would return to the handler and indicate a 'find' usually by barking, before leading the handler to the casualty location.

Stock testing also became standard practice. Search dogs often train and work in mountain areas where they encounter livestock, primarily sheep. The farmers were well aware of the work being undertaken and were keen to help by testing that the dogs were safe with their livestock. Passing a stock test before search training began became mandatory and still is today.

Charlie Relph, a farmer in Borrowdale, spent many an hour with Neville Sharp supervising the testing of potential search dogs. Charlie always had a strong opinion about Alsations and he kept a watchful eye over them. He was always fair, and very rarely wrong in his judgement, such was the strength of the man. Sue Shuttleworth, a veterinary surgeon from Haslingden in Lancashire, became our first honorary vet, courtesy of an invitation from Peter Durst. Sue gave many years of support to our operational dogs, including provision of annual injections. She fulfilled this important and self-made role until 2006.

In 1985 Peter Durst and Ian Brown attended the Mountain Rescue Council annual conference in Exeter to talk about search dogs and their deployment. This was followed by the first search dog training in the south west near Prince Town. The first two South West dog handlers were Terry Bumford and Paddy Cummings, both grading in 1986.

With the now well established annual assessment course in Keswick and the growth of the association it became clear that funding continuous training courses, not only in the Lakes but in other regions, would put a major strain on the association.





It was around this time that Pedigree Petfoods offered to support the association in the provision of dog food and (PAL) mountain jackets. Each year they would send a representative to the assessment course to monitor our activities.

Jim Coyle BEM, Team Leader and dog handler from Cockermouth was a very early member in Scotland, joining in 1969. He was able to advise on the training methods promoted by Hamish McInnes. In 1983 Dave Riley took on the role of training officer and working with Jim, established the training standards for the association.

We should mention that there were many experienced handlers at this time who supported the work and training of the search dogs and to name only a few would seem unfair. Without them this association would not have been possible, so in writing these historical notes we have chiefly mentioned position holders and influential members. However everyone was crucial to the way forward.

In 1986 Dave Riley and Davy Jones (Wales) responded to a request from the International Rescue Corps UK to attend the earthquake in El Salvador. This was the first time any of our handlers had responded to an overseas request for help. They spent several days in the capital San Salvador searching the many collapsed buildings, primarily looking for survivors. They were involved in some remarkable rescues of people trapped in the many destroyed buildings. Unfortunately on their return to the UK both dogs had to spend six months in quarantine, the cost of which was kindly paid for by Pedigree Petfoods.



In El Salvador



Jim Coyle



Angela Locke wrote the novels SEARCH DOG and SAM & CO. based on her extensive research spent out and about with SARDA. Proceeds were donated directly to the organisation



Really?...

**HANDLERS COULD BE QUITE ISOLATED. IN THE 1980S THE DOGS WOULD OFTEN BE CALLED OUT AT NIGHT WITHOUT SUPPORT APART FROM A NAVIGATOR, AND IF REQUIRED THE TEAMS WOULD THEN JOIN AT FIRST LIGHT.**

Mick Blood, veteran dog handler and dogsbody  
Quotation from the 50th Anniversary Oral History Project, *Telling Tales*



## >> DOGFACT

At the end of this decade  
66 dog handlers had  
successfully completed  
their training.

Dog Tags were introduced in order to identify a fully qualified and registered search dog. They remain the holy grail of all handlers to this day.

In 1988 the committee introduced a pilot log book scheme designed, by South West Handler, Paddy Cummings, to allow all handlers to record their training progress and provide uniformity for the training officer. This allowed continuity at each training course leading to final assessment - this system has been successfully used for many years and continues to be so.



SARDA CHAIRMAN  
1981-1990 Peter Durst





# 1988 LOCKERBIE

## PAN AM FLIGHT 103



On the fateful night of the 21st December 1988 at about 7:00 pm, Pan-Am flight 103, a Boeing 747 en route to New York City from London, exploded over the border town of Lockerbie, Scotland.

The blast caused the plane to break into thousands of pieces, landing in an area covering roughly 850 square miles (2,200 square km). All 259 passengers and crew members were killed. Falling wreckage destroyed 21 houses and killed an additional 11 people on the ground.

After the initial attendance of the police, fire and ambulance that night, there followed the activation of a major incident response. This resulted in the largest deployment of emergency responders to deal with the aftermath of a single major disaster in the UK. Requests to many other rescue agencies were urgently made including one to SARDA, where handlers with their dogs answered the call, travelling to Lockerbie from all parts of the UK. Their deployment started immediately, until in the early hours of the 24th December they commenced a major search to support the recovery operations. In the history of the association this was to prove to be search and recovery in the extreme.



Above: Sherwood Crescent and handlers at the site



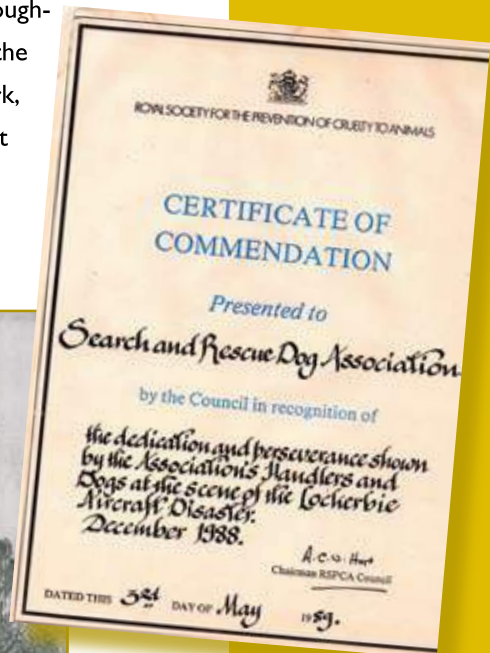
In the days that followed, the dog teams were engaged in vast area searches covering the surrounding countryside in an effort to locate missing victims and vital evidence linked to the incident. During the call-out dog teams accounted for 120 victims, a vast quantity of luggage as well as huge amounts of aircraft wreckage. A total of 48 search and rescue dog teams from SARDA associations throughout the British Isles attended in the first ten days. They searched an estimated total of 100 national grid squares in 2,500 team hours, with an additional 300 hours of searching during the following January.

Handlers and dogs were exposed to scenes of devastation around the town and the remains of the aircraft. Seven dogs and four handlers suffered injuries whilst searching through the debris, while many others suffered from the exposure to fumes from the aviation fuel. The searches were both physically demanding, given the prevailing adverse weather conditions, and mentally stressful for both handlers and dogs.

The value of the dog teams on that first horrific night and throughout the following days was recognised by both the police and the Aircraft Accident Investigation Branch (AAIB). Their team work, their ability to integrate with other agencies and their steadfast professional approach made a substantial contribution in the quest to find possible survivors and the subsequent search for aircraft debris.



Early searches found aircraft parts



Citations from the Scottish and Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

Letter of thanks to SARDA from the representatives of Pan-American Airways, January 1989



Thomas G. Plasket  
Chairman of the Board

January 25, 1989

Rescue Panel and  
Main Accident Panel

Dear Mr. Durst:

On behalf of Pan American World Airways, I wish to express our sincere appreciation and gratitude for the support and assistance you offered so unselfishly throughout the period after the bombing of our Flight 103 on December 21, 1988.

It is sad that it took a tragedy of this magnitude for so many individuals and volunteer organizations, many of whom were total strangers to one another, to come together in a strong bond to work as a team. It is an experience that we can never forget, and our thoughts will always remain with the victims, their families and friends, and the residents of Lockerbie.

Hopefully, time will sooth the horror of cruel and savage destruction of innocent people, and we will be left with the memories of the warmth and unity of everyone who spent long days and nights in a unified spirit of compassion for others.

Again, please accept our deepest appreciation for all of your kindness and sincere efforts on behalf of those whose lives were changed forever by the tragedy of Flight 103 over Lockerbie.

Sincerely,

Pan Am Building, New York, New York 10166



Andy Colau with Corrie in 1982. Andy was present at Lockerbie and currently works his 6th dog in the Yorkshire Dales

As Mountain Rescue team members each handler carried a heavy burden of responsibility to complete that mission in the true spirit of volunteers within the United Kingdom.







The amazing ability of dogs to carry out searches that actually result in successful finds is well recognised. Their effect on the performance of the rest of a team perhaps less so. Prior to dogs coming into action searches with limited information, poor weather and impending nightfall were approached with limited enthusiasm and an increasing awareness of a diminishing chance of success.

The dogs changed all that. They became enthusiastic players who did not contemplate failure. This is infectious and feeds an optimistic approach within the whole team. Not only are they magnificent in their primary role they are also unwitting morale boosters at difficult times.

David Allan, former Chairman of MREW

# 1990s



## THE NINETIES



The annual course at Keswick became part-funded by Pedigree Petfoods in 1990 and welcomed overseas visitors from the Blue and Grey Rescue Dog Unit in Virginia, USA. This was the first of several international exchange visits engaged in to expand learning while strengthening ideas and knowledge across the globe. Following on from this there were exchange visits made to the Norwegian Avalanche Search dogs, disaster search work in Sweden, and a World Conference in Berlin. Further visits were made to the USA and Iceland. A great deal was learnt from these visits. Whilst we do not experience many avalanches in the UK it is well known that the search and recovery of missing victims allows only a small 'time window' in which they are able to survive.



Above right: Swedish search dogs in action  
Above: USA Law Enforcement trailing dogs  
Below: Avalanche search dogs Norway



THE NINETIES

November 1990 saw the proposal to split the training into three specific groups, each to have a dedicated training officer.

### Basic - Intermediate - Advanced

It was also agreed to appoint a central Membership Registrar and further appoint a Regional Training Co-ordinator for each area.

Prior to this transition all training had been undertaken by a singular training officer, with support and input from senior handlers. The work load had grown and management required a more structured approach. The work of puppy training and registration became well established and provided a good and efficient start to engage in the training programme.

By 1992 there were 54 search dogs operating in England and the association found itself in a similar situation to the 1971 split. They say history cannot repeat itself! The Lakes handlers decided to form their own organisation, Lake District Mountain Rescue Search Dogs, comprising of twenty seven handlers resident in their area. This would allow for easier regional training and other associated administration issues. A similar number remained in SARDA England.

Jacquie Hall, a dog trainer and animal behaviourist, also offered her services to our association. Jacquie was a member of a MR team in Northumberland and had started to train a dog herself. Sadly, in 1993 the dog had to be retired due to an injury before being assessed as a search dog. Jacquie returned as a dogsbody shortly after this but then became instrumental in progressing a more formal system for the early stages of training prior to actual registration as a trainee. This included teaching handlers how best to encourage a working partnership between dog and handler from the moment they get their puppy.



Jacquie Hall, advisor and mentor





Who's watching who? The stock test



Sharing the experience



As Jacquie understands what is ultimately required from a dog team in search and rescue she has the ability to provide handlers with very relevant training to dogs from as early as 10 weeks old. This early imprinting is extremely valuable for the training of a puppy.

Jacquie works hard with the handlers, who have proven mountain skills but may have never owned or trained a dog before. She uses many techniques to teach them the fundamentals of dog training as well as specialised training geared towards search and rescue work. Some dogs arrive with genetic temperament issues, which are also addressed in early training.

Training offered is a unique package for every dog/handler partnership.

Jacquie has been the back-bone of our introductory training programme for the past twenty five years which helps maintain its high standards. Handlers often refer back to her throughout their training to sort any training problems that may arise. Many handlers have developed through this system and graded their dogs to become search dogs thanks to 'Auntie' Jacquie.

In her own words: 'Seeing a dog team finally be assessed suitable to be on the callout list is my ultimate reward for doing this work. It makes me so proud to feel I have helped in some way to save a life.'





In the 1990s many successful 'finds' were being made on operational searches. One notable incident was the search and rescue of Sir Fred Hoyle on November 24th, 1997. Sir Fred was out walking whilst visiting his childhood home near Eldwick, Bingley. He was a famous physicist and arguably the most important astronomer of the last century after Albert Einstein. Handler Simon Adams and his dog Tip, along with Eleanor Dale with Bonnie, and Alasdair Earnshaw with Corrie, were tasked to search an area north of Eldwick, called Shipley Glen. Sir Fred was found in the darkness in the early hours of the following morning by search dog Tip. He was unconscious after falling a considerable distance down a very steep sided gully in the woods of Shipley Glen. Some time later, after recovery in hospital, he visited the Calder Valley Search and Rescue Team to say, 'thank you', especially to dog 'Tip'. Coincidentally both Simon and his navigator Martin Woodhead were physics teachers and very familiar with the name Fred Hoyle.

Records show that in 1998 there had been 76 callouts requesting the service of the search dogs with three successful finds. Pressure was once more building around the most efficient way to run the training programme. SARDA had always suffered due to the considerable geographic distances that the association had responsibility for. This stretched from the Scottish border, taking in the Cheviot Hills in the north east down to the North Yorkshire Moors, the whole of the Pennines, Yorkshire Dales, the Peak District and as far south as Dartmoor.



Sir Fred Hoyle, Simon and Tip



Training with the RAF in the Pennines



#### SARDA CHAIRMAN

|           |               |
|-----------|---------------|
| 1991-1992 | Peter Natress |
| 1992-2000 | Mike Amps     |



A mountain search in operation

## >> DOGFACT

At the end of this decade  
46 dog handlers had  
successfully completed  
their training.

## 1998

76 callouts, 3 finds

Training took place in all the five designated regions quite separate to national courses. In November 1999 it was agreed that the training stages of all dogs would take place in three specific stage groups. As before there would be an appointed member to take responsibility of each group as follows:

- Stage 1      **Early training**    Developing the dogs' 'body' focus and find sequence (locating the body, returning to the handler and indicating, normally by barking). These enable the dog to make 'blind' finds on bodies where their location is unknown to the handler, providing a consistent and reliable indication.
- Stage 2      **Search Training**    The development of techniques to search small areas, extending the dogs' abilities in drive and performance. The introduction of more difficult search areas with several 'bodies', leading to small areas successfully being searched and all bodies located.
- Stage 3      **Assessment Training**    The searching of larger, more complicated areas in more difficult terrain, extending the time factors and introducing the search planning required to successfully undertake the final assessment areas.





HELLO - IT'S SARDA - CAN  
I CHECK SOMETHING ON  
OUR INSURANCE



# SEARCH DOGS



Wisp



Bolt



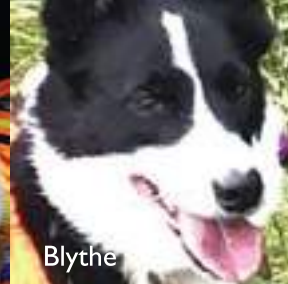
Abbie



Cassie



Chief



Blythe



Kez



Flo



Griff



# SEARCH DOGS



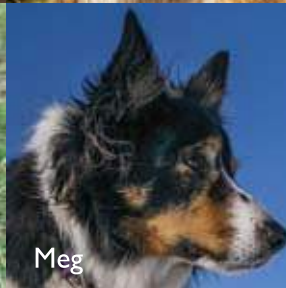
Jack



KT



Mac



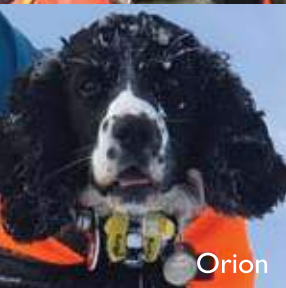
Meg



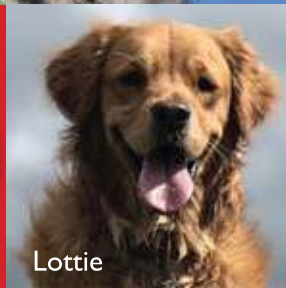
Izzy



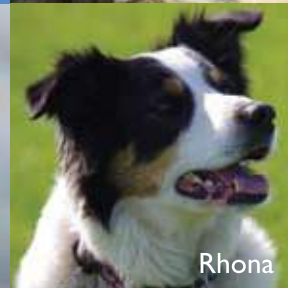
Olly



Orion



Lottie



Rhona



Roy

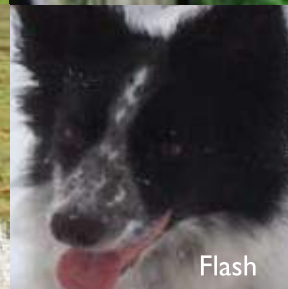
# SEARCH DOGS



Scout



Tarn



Flash



# SEARCH DOGS



Oscar



Tess



Wynn



Ben

The operational dogs on call and the dogs in training are a variety of breeds and apart from the many border collies include smooth coat collie, labrador, springer spaniel, golden retriever, english shepherd, pointer, hovawart and cross breeds.

# TRAINEE DOGS



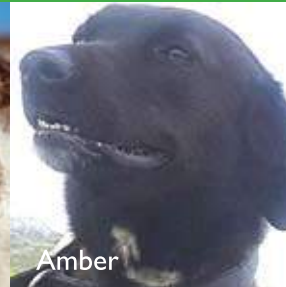
Izzy



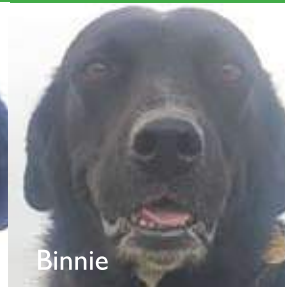
Stan



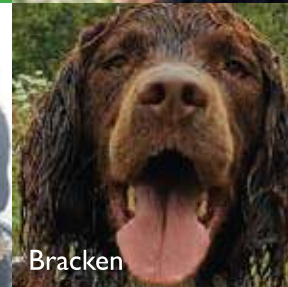
Flynn



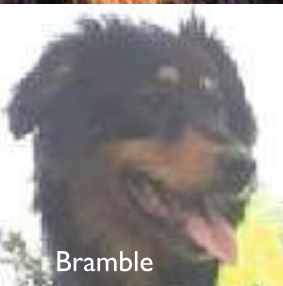
Amber



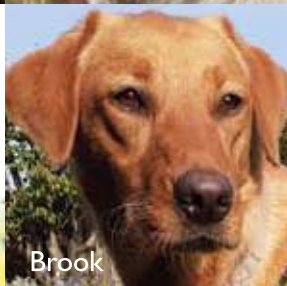
Binnie



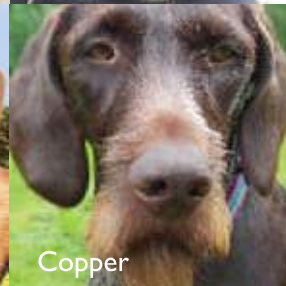
Bracken



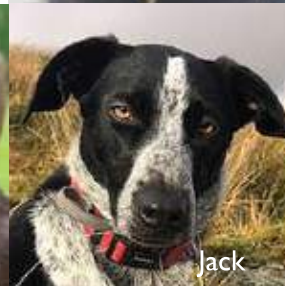
Bramble



Brook



Copper



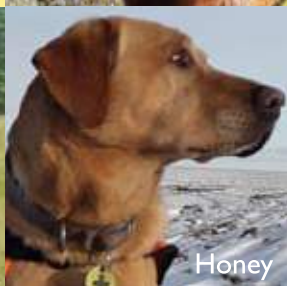
Jack



Bill



Gus



Honey

# TRAINEE DOGS



Jess



Pip



Oscar



Rolf



Tess



# 2000s

## THE NEW MILLENIUM

SARDA PRESIDENT  
Neville Sharp  
2001 - 2021



In 2001 the whole of the country was affected by an epidemic of Foot and Mouth disease which had a very serious impact on the farming community. Spreading across hundreds of farms throughout the country and closing down the movement of livestock it became apparent that this very infectious and deadly disease was very easily spread by almost anyone. As a consequence regulations were imposed and countryside access was closed down.

Access to land was forbidden including venturing on to the fells and mountains. The main training programme stopped, but also the public were restricted from walking and trekking in the mountains. This in itself reduced the likelihood of any major searches involving search dogs. Handlers trained locally in an effort to maintain their dogs' performance. In certain areas the military were supportive of our training needs and allowed access to private ministry of defence facilities. Almost a full year was lost before the disease was contained, but only after a great impact on the farming community. Eventually training started to get back to some form of normality.





Neville Sharp was invited to become president in January 2001. He had been actively involved in mountain rescue since the early 1970's and from 1996 - 2005 he held the position of team leader of Calder Valley Search and Rescue Team. His time with SARDA started in the mid 1970's. Over the years he has been a handler, training advisor, assessor and chair of the assessment meetings. He had worked tirelessly to ensure the continuing success of SARDA.

Nicki Lyons became chairperson in 2001. Nicki started her work with SARDA after grading her first dog Dart in 1988. She was awarded an MBE in 2008 for her services to Search and Rescue Dogs and Mountain Rescue. Nicki has been a key player in steering the stage two and three training for many years. She has guided handlers towards their first assessment, working alongside her husband Alex, who trained four search dogs, took on the role of training officer and has also been an assessor for many years.

It became noticeable around the middle of the decade that the list of operational handlers on the call out list was reduced. In 2006 only 22 handlers were operational - a reflection of how the Foot and Mouth epidemic had impacted on the training. Handlers who, prior to the outbreak, were ready to undertake their assessment suffered a significant setback and the overall effect was a reduction in operational capacity.



Direction and control,  
lead and follow - teamwork  
at its best

THE 2000s



#### SARDA CHAIRMAN

2001-2004 Nicki Lyons. MBE

2005-2009 David Warden



During this period there was a greater demand for search dogs to assist the police service working in urban areas. Due to the general austerity and cut-backs with front line services in the country, the police service was greatly reduced in many specialist roles, including police dog handlers. The deployment of Mountain Rescue teams and search dogs increased, with more focus on assisting and supporting the police with searches for missing, vulnerable people, in urban areas. This type of search included woodland, fields and sometimes public areas. In changing times Mountain Rescue teams were seen as a valuable resource, trained and capable of providing additional manpower to the police service.

After forty years of well-rehearsed procedures, changed and modified over time, we had achieved a strong development plan for new handlers. Emphasis was placed on potential new handlers spending a period of time engaging with the training and acting as a body, allowing them to further understand and experience the end result.





In 2007 West Mount Vets, Todmorden, West Yorkshire offered their support in caring for annual injections and annual examinations for all our dogs. This work and sponsorship continues to this day and we are extremely grateful to veterinary surgeon Vickie Weedon.

As Vickie explains: 'I've been involved with SARDA England for 13 years and it has been a privilege working with such dedicated individuals and fantastic animals. I meet the dogs once a year to health check and vaccinate them and as you would expect they are a generally extremely healthy bunch! The mixture of good breeds, attentive care and active lifestyle seems to result in robust dogs. They do however sustain some injuries associated with their work. I've seen SARDA dogs at clinics with cuts and scrapes, eye injuries and joint strains, especially to their knees. The dogs are excellent patients and I've even been able to do minor procedures under local anaesthetic. As with all of us they are not immune to the wear and tear that comes with age with some of the older dogs suffering from arthritis. However they can often enjoy working to a ripe old age by implementing lifestyle changes and using joint supplements or medication.'



'I have been very lucky to have had support practically and in donations from the practice and also various drug companies over the years.'

'As a lifelong mountain walker and someone who enjoys the great outdoors, I hope I never need help from one of the search dogs but it is very comforting to know they are there.'

Vicky with local trainee search dog Tess (left) and search dog Jack (right)



Vickie checking over search dogs in 2020

## >> DOGFACT

In 2001 there were 30 handlers on call-out list.

Throughout this period 26 dog handlers had successfully completed their training..

2 handlers graded second dogs





# 2010s



The start of this decade saw an increase in requests to assist the emergency services. Our call outs increased and the range of incidents we were attending, at times, took us away from the mountains. The Chairman at this time, Ian Thompson, reported that during 2011 there had been 128 searches undertaken and 17 casualties found.

## March 2011

A sad but most notable search was undertaken in March 2011 by Dave Mason and his dog Megan, accompanied by Ian Burley and search dog Anya. Both handlers were deployed along with the Derby Mountain Rescue Team assisting the police in Derbyshire. The search was to find a vulnerable missing person who had failed to return home from work. The handlers were deployed to search heavy woodland and following a short but intense search the deceased body of a female was found by search dog Megan.



The deceased had been hidden and totally concealed under heavy logs and vegetation. The consequence of this 'find' led to a murder enquiry and the early detection by the search dog assisted in the early apprehension of the offender. Both Dave and Megan received a Chief Constable's Commendation for their commitment and professionalism.

**SARDA CHAIRMAN**  
2010-2016 Ian Thompson  
2017 Ian Speirs  
2018-2021 David Warden

Buxton Advertiser, Thursday, December 15, 2011 13

# Murder police praise rescuer

DETECTIVES have praised Buxton Mountain Rescue Team's Deputy Leader Dave Mason and search dog Megan for the part they played in a murder investigation.

In March, Dave and Megan were called to help search woodland in the Somercotes area of Derbyshire after a 25-year-old Thorntons worker went missing on her way home from work.

The body of Jia Ashton was later found by Megan hidden deep in woodland. In October, David Simmonds, 21, was jailed for a minimum of 28 years for Jia's murder.

Last week, Dave and Megan received the Chief Constable's Commendation during a special ceremony held at police headquarters in Ripley.

Dave said: "The body of Jia had been hidden so well it is possible that she would not have been found without the use of a dog.

"This was a challenging search. Megan's find ensured that vital forensic evidence was secured. I am extremely proud of her."



**COMMENDATION:** Buxton Mountain Rescue Team's Dave Mason and search dog Megan. Photo contributed.

## March 2012

On the 21 March 2012 dog teams Bill Batson with his dog Glen and Andy Colau with Tara answered a call to assist on a search in dense fog on Ingleborough, in the Yorkshire Dales. This followed a report to North Yorkshire Police Authority of a crashed light aircraft. The wreck with two injured men was located on a remote hillside, to the east of the summit, by Search Dog Glen shortly after midnight. The two men were evacuated 2km by stretcher to rescue team vehicles and taken to hospital where they received treatment for their injuries.



## October 2012

What was scheduled as a normal national training weekend in South Wales, with handlers working towards their assessments in the next few months changed dramatically. This disruption was due to the search for April Jones in Machynlleth, mid Wales which became one of the largest police, mountain rescue and coastguard operations since Lockerbie.

After two hard days of searching woodlands, forest, open ground and water courses, the Welsh teams were grateful to receive support from colleagues across the English border. Dogs and handlers were able to travel daily from the weekend training base in Brecon, or their home address, to join the other teams and contribute to a major logistical search. Although there were no positive results, all those involved were able to both extend the information gathered and learn a great deal from their own experience. After this and following a significant review, mountain rescue developed many new procedures and technology to assist with both the major and smaller scale incidents.







Cairngorms training in February: a test for dogs, handlers and the 'bodies' alike



## Winter Course

The association further developed through what was to become an annual course in the Cairngorms in Scotland. This training would develop more skills - extending their abilities, particularly in extreme winter conditions. These remote mountainous areas generally provide heavy and deep snow to enable dogsbodies to be 'hidden' completely from the dogs. This technique involves digging graves in the snow fields, leaving very little evidence of a buried person. Safety is paramount so each and everyone has radio contact with the instructor. The purpose and end result ensures that the dogs have to work extremely hard and concentrate on the very surface point on the snow where they detect human scent. This ultimately increases the dogs' focus and drive in all their search work. They thoroughly enjoy this work and are undeterred by the snow and cold conditions. Having located the scent source, dogs are encouraged to dig down to the body where they are duly rewarded with their play-toy.

A new tag was introduced for dogs passing their registration and stock test indicating that they have attained a level of obedience which enables them to work safely in areas where they could encounter stock (sheep).





Hamish, Neville and Kenny at the golden anniversary event

2015 was another major anniversary date. The celebration of the formation of SARDA in 1965 by Hamish MacInnes. Held in Fort William there was a stupendous gathering of past and current members. Welcome was made to Hamish, Catherine MacLeod, Kenny McKenzie, Bill Mitchie to name but a few. Members of our association made the journey north to join the gathering and reminisce over interesting stories from the past.



There have been many TV programmes which have featured the dogs and their handlers down the years. One of these was in 2015 when the *Countryfile* production team interviewed our members training at Chew Valley, Greenfield. Ellie Harrison was the presenter and the feature was later screened to national BBC audiences.



For seventeen years Matt Robertson held the position of Stage I training officer (starting in 2003). Matt was able to share his vast knowledge gained through his police career both as an operational police dog handler and in the development, delivery and management of police dog training in the Ministry of Defence Police. In 2010 Matt was awarded the MBE for his services to training of dogs for police and Mountain Rescue. After grading his first search dog in 2001 and a second in 2008 he is now training his third dog. He has been engaged in many major searches over the years.

Alex Lyons was invited to take on the role of President of SARDA South Wales in 2016. Alex had been part of our association since 1986 and being based in the south west had regularly worked closely with our sister organisation in SARDA South Wales providing his wealth of dog training experience.

In 2017 a decision was made to broaden training capability to train scent specific trailing dogs. These dogs would be deployed to incidents where the last known point of a missing person was known and they could help in establishing the direction of travel or possible location. Trainers and handlers involved attended external courses from which an assessment programme was created and implemented with a few dogs progressing in this new discipline.

At the 2018 AGM, following many months of deliberation, SARDA England changed its working name to Mountain Rescue Search Dogs England in order to reinforce the mountain rescue connection along with the responsibilities and purpose of the association. A re-designed logo was created to provide a fresh and attractive identity whilst clear branding aligned the association with the wider MR identity. This was then rolled out across a newly designed website and enhanced social media presence which encouraged the creation of dynamic new imagery from across members of the association. MRSDE proudly engages with an ever growing audience now regularly interacting and communicating across these platforms.

[www.mountainrescuerearchdogsengland.org.uk](http://www.mountainrescuerearchdogsengland.org.uk)



>>  
**DOGFACT**

Throughout this period  
30 dog handlers successfully  
completed their training.





# AND NOW..



## TAKING STOCK AND LOOKING AHEAD

After fifty years of learning and experimenting we now have a well tried and tested rigorous system for training all our dogs. All sister SARDA associations work closely together and frequently co-assess each others dogs when under assessment. This provides continuity in standards and incorporates an element of sharing.

On the 23rd March 2020 due to the corona virus pandemic which was affecting the world, the UK was locked down by the government.

The association suspended all planned training events. During this period the public were allowed to take short walks and as more people were venturing out there was a rise in minor falls and accidents in urban and lowland areas. Teams in these areas saw an increase in requests for their services. As the restrictions on activities were eased in June there was then a surge of accidents on the local crags and hills. In late June some members were beginning to train their dogs again on a one to one basis with strict protocols in place.

The dogs were found to be enthusiastic in getting back to their 'play times', not knowing why they had been deprived of their games. In July the committee agreed to go ahead with a national course in Devon during August for which rigid guidelines were in place. As the pandemic continued restrictions were re-introduced causing further disruption to training. At the time of going to press in spring 2021 there seemed to be a slow recovery as training began to resume both locally and nationally.



**MAKING LIFE DIFFICULT FOR DOGS AND HANDLERS MAKES FOR GOOD TRAINING. I THINK IT'S QUITE SPECIAL WHEN WE CAN HELP WITH TRAINING A DOG FROM PUPPY STAGE ALL THE WAY TO BE FULLY QUALIFIED AS A SEARCH DOG AND ON TO GETTING THE FIRST FIND.**

Rob Parnell, experienced dogsbody, South West region





# DOGSBODIES

BY JOHN AND FRED A HILL



John Hill - found and playing!

It was a lovely sunny day when we went to Bakewell Show in 1999.

The local Mountain Rescue (MR) team had a display and this included leaflets giving information about the search and rescue dogs that work with the MR teams not just in the Peak District but all over England. This was enough to prompt a visit to the website to read more about the training of the dogs.

After a few emails with Rod Kelly, senior member and experienced dogsbody with the association, followed by a 12 month delay when the foot and mouth epidemic closed the countryside, we headed to Hathersage one Sunday morning to see for ourselves how the magic worked.

Before we went to the area, a dog handler explained the basic principles of training and searching and especially what 'air scenting' meant. We headed to Burbage Valley and with handler Ellie Sherwin in charge of the area, we watched the bodies being allocated to their respective hiding places and saw how the dogs and handlers worked to find them. It was fascinating to watch and then Ellie asked us if we would like a go at being a dogsbody?

Without hesitation we said, 'Yes' and we soon found ourselves sitting behind our respective rocks wondering if the dogs would find us and more importantly what it would feel like to be lost or injured, unable to help ourselves and hoping to be rescued.





For a dog and handler to become competent as a search team they need the help of the dogsbodies. Once dog and handler reach puppy class, a body who is prepared to do a lot of running, shouting and generally making a fool of themselves is introduced to encourage the young dogs. It's all about play and reward for the dog.

At the other extreme, when the dog and handler are preparing for assessment or upgrade, then the job of the body becomes a quiet, undercover operation. We can't hide from the dogs because they are going to find us by our scent being carried on the air, but we can make it more challenging for the handlers.

The most important aspect of being a body is personal safety and comfort. If we think we need a sling to secure our position then perhaps we should find a safer place to hide! Everyone keeps warm in different ways and over time we have both worked out how we like to keep warm on the hill. Some bodies take a sleeping bag and snuggle inside their bivvy bag, others prefer to use more layers. It doesn't matter how we manage to keep warm but it is essential that we do. In a training environment we don't want to create a live rescue situation! It doesn't take long to work out that the weather at our training base, as compared to the situation on the hillside, can be at totally opposite ends of the spectrum. If we plan for the worst then we can ensure that we'll be able to cope with whatever we get.



All terrain, all weather



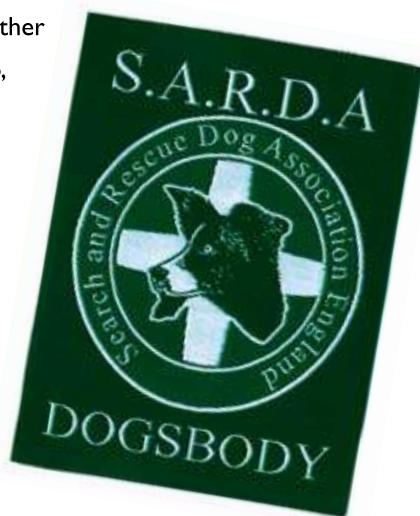
Bodies come up with some ingenious ideas for hiding. It can be as simple as wearing camouflage clothing and then keeping very still as this makes hiding possible even in an exposed place where there is little cover. Some use camo-sheets to help them to blend into the surroundings, cover themselves with bracken, hide in dips in the ground, make use of a wall or bridge or sometimes sit in a tree!

Occasionally we need to be seen. We introduced the Bowyer Flags named after Malcolm Bowyer, handler and assessor, who once set up a training area, but from his vantage point couldn't see where the bodies were finally located. The yellow flags have been very useful pieces of equipment and used to signal to the assessors our position before the search commences.

Not all training is carried out in the Great Outdoors and it's just as challenging finding a hiding place in an urban environment. It could be in a cupboard or fireplace in a house, on top of the log pile in the grounds or in a skip and for the adventurous body, a dry suit and a leaky boat or river bank can also create a brilliant hiding place.

Being involved as a body doesn't have to stop when we leave the hillside as there are positions on the Committee that can be taken up.

This wouldn't be everyone's choice but there are often opportunities to help in other ways. We, ourselves help with the upkeep, storage and transportation of the radios used to keep everyone in touch on the hillside during national training weekends. Previously we have helped the Equipment Officer by cleaning and storing some of the spare body kit and taking it to courses. We have also contributed to the communal meals and housekeeping at the residential weekends.





Bodies can also help with fundraising and in our case this involves giving talks to raise awareness of Mountain Rescue Search Dogs England (MRSDE). Groups we have spoken to have been as small as 8 or as large as 100 and whether the audience is involved with dogs or not, they are always impressed by the training of the dogs and the dedication of the handlers to achieve their goal of being on the call out list ready to help the missing person.

During the summer months there are dog shows, village fêtes, country fairs and countless events all over the country and MRSDE attends many of them with their display stand and demonstrations. It sounds impossible to condense up to 3 years training into a 25 minute display but with several handlers showing the different stages of training and the bodies helping too, the impossible can be achieved.

During the (nearly) 20 years of being bodies we have visited some beautiful parts of the country, been on the hill in all weathers and felt it a privilege to play a small part in the training of the dogs and handlers. We are always thrilled to hear when a dog has made an operational find; it makes the days in the lashing rain, howling gales or scorching sun worthwhile.

Over our time volunteering as a body there have been many changes to the association and some of these have had a significant effect on the role of the dogsbody. The main changes have been the introduction of more radios which are now smaller, lighter and simpler to use as well as loan equipment such as bivvy bags, roll mats and torches.

It has been a great pleasure to support this organisation over many years. The commitment and enthusiasm of both dogs and handlers becomes infectious with the ultimate reward of knowing that one day 'a life might be saved'.





# SAR HELICOPTERS



## IN SUPPORT OF SEARCH DOGS

For the majority of the the last fifty years The Royal Air Force has supported Mountain Rescue and the search dogs.

In the very early days of Mountain Rescue, helicopters were often deployed on the rescue missions. They were mainly used in support of mountain accidents or incidents where either access was difficult or time was critical.



The start of helicopter support to mountain search and rescue goes back to the early 1960's when the Whirlwind helicopter provided limited support. The Whirlwind was replaced in the 1970's by the Wessex helicopter, an aircraft which was better suited to rescue work, having twin engines.

In the late 1970s the Sea King helicopter came on the scene providing another aircraft capable of rescue work. The Sea King introduced a much better search and rescue capability, being a larger helicopter with a greater fuel load which could maintain the aircraft for about six hours. It was also capable of operating in all weathers. Throughout the above years all three aircraft were operational at different air bases and the change from one aircraft to another was over several years. The service provided by the RAF would end in 2015.

Today Sikorsky helicopters are used and controlled by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency which also supports Mountain Rescue services throughout the UK. With the introduction of operational search dogs in the country in the 1970's it was inevitable that dog handlers would experience interaction with these aircraft and a programme of continuous training is now undertaken with dogs from all areas.

The sheer presence of a helicopter in very close proximity to a dog appears at the very least frightening and unnerving. Like all other aspect of mountain rescue work, training is vital. All the dogs go through a familiarisation period involving being introduced to the noise, presence and wind turbulence when near the aircraft. It is paramount that when the dogs are boarding or leaving a helicopter they wear a secure safety or winching harness. It is normal practice to hold the dog close to the handler's body to provide confidence and support whilst ensuring minimal chance of panic. Dogs and handlers frequently have to be winched down to the ground because of impossible landing conditions and it is fair to say some dogs adapt better than others. Quick deployment of both equipment and search dogs to remote or difficult areas is very admirably undertaken by the coastguard helicopters which jointly provide a unique response to people who may well be in grave danger in the mountains and hills in the UK.



Top: RAF Whirlwind  
Centre: RAF Sea King  
Bottom: Coastguard Sikorsky S-92





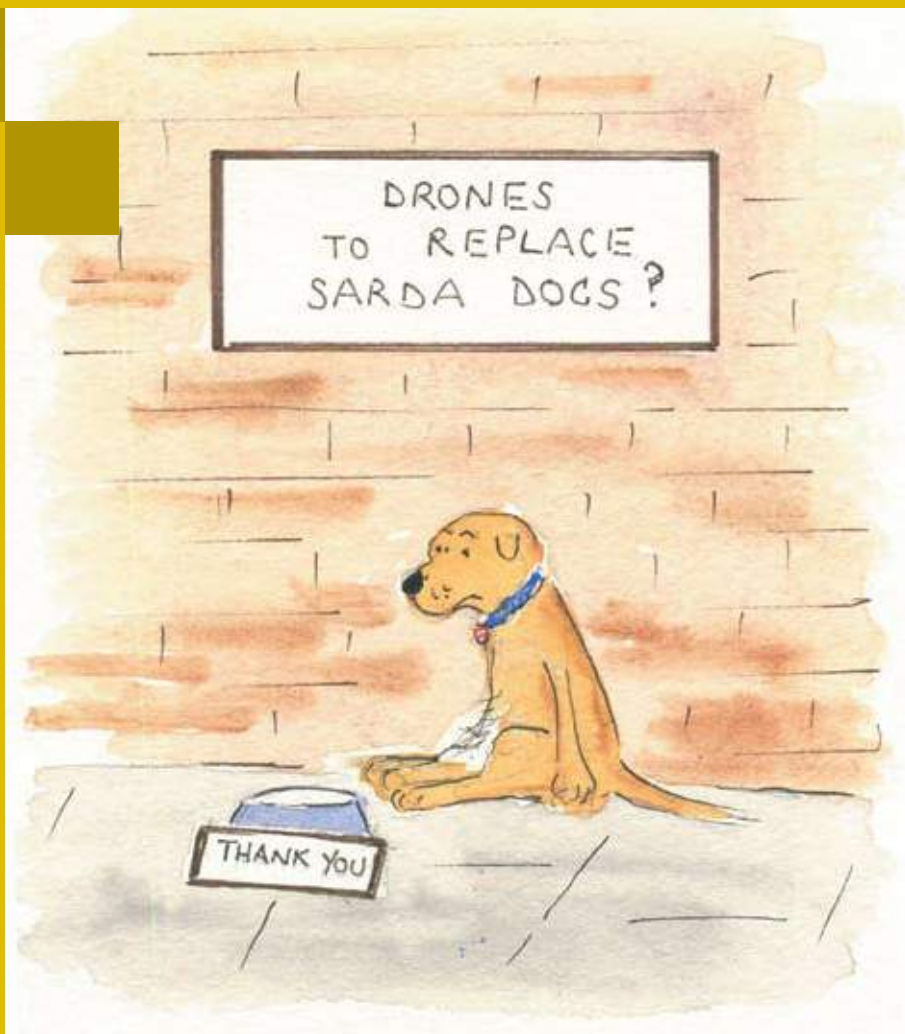
## >> HELI FACT

With the current Sikorsky S-92 there can be a wind speed draught in excess of 50 knots almost equivalent to a Category I hurricane!









**MANY CONGRATULATIONS FOR 50 YEARS' SERVICE TO THE PUBLIC.  
THE DEDICATION OF HANDLERS MATCHES THAT OF THEIR DOGS.  
I HAVE BEEN LUCKY ENOUGH TO WITNESS MANY LIVES SAVED BY  
THESE SKILLED SEARCH DOGS OVER THE YEARS.**

Mike France MBE

Senior Executive Officer, Mountain Rescue England & Wales

# DRONES + TECH

## IS THERE STILL A USE FOR DOGS ?

Brian Allport & Ian Thompson

In more recent years modern technology has advanced the design and availability of various types of navigation equipment.

Most people nowadays who venture into the hills and mountains have Global Positioning Systems (GPS) devices. These may be in the way of smart cell phones or more individual specific navigation devices. More and more, our satellite systems have grown to support such equipment providing the rambler, hill walker or mountaineer with access to digital mapping and instant location referencing. These are all fine but everyone should remember they all need a good and constant power supply coupled with good coverage of not only mobile signals but also satellite connections. When working, they are very efficient and effective but will never replace the user's ability to map read and use a compass. Never-the-less modern technology has its place and digital mapping and route planning are significant aids to navigation.

More recently there has been the introduction of drones which have the capacity to fly remotely in open areas to assist in search work.

The training of personnel to control these units is extensive and controlled by the Civil Aviation Authority. It was recognised early in their use that the camera facility on them additionally requires a second person to study the pictures relayed back to the monitor. Controllers and pilots are required to undertake assessments by the authority which covers training in air law and responsibilities, airspace operating principles, airmanship and aviation safety, human factors, meteorology, navigation charts, aircraft knowledge and operating procedure.



## DRONES



CAA Pilot examinations in progress





It has to be accepted that drones are another tool in the Search Manager's tool box. They are usable in darkness if fitted with a thermal imaging camera, but their use is limited in windy or poor conditions.

In ideal circumstances they are a very valuable aid to the speedy location of missing persons and casualties by reducing search times in open areas and providing information to assist in the deployment of resources. They will not replace search dogs which will work with a high level of success in most terrains, weather conditions and light levels. Drones will contribute to a wider package of resources available to search managers to *help save lives in wild and remote places*.

## SARCALL

SARCALL is the UK's leading internet-based call out and incident management platform, using a software package developed over the last ten years in the UK for Mountain Rescue teams by Mountain Rescue personnel. SARCALL manages everything from notifying personnel directly to their smart phones to recording incident information and capturing the debriefing data. Team members can be called out, stood down or placed on stand-by through a simple text message to their mobile, to which a reply can be made indicating availability. SARCALL is now used by all UK Mountain Rescue, Lowland Search and Rescue and Cave Rescue teams together with large numbers of Police Forces, Fire and Rescue and Ambulance Services.

## SARLOC

SARLOC is an integral part of the SARCALL system. As with SARCALL it is a smart-phone application again developed by Mountain Rescue team personnel for mountain rescue, but its success and reliability has led to increasing use by Police Services throughout the UK. The application has been developed to help Mountain Rescue teams deal more quickly with incidents in which a walker needing help is unable to give his/her location. If the walker in trouble is using a smartphone, then he/ she is sent a text message with a link to a webpage. Clicking on this link opens a page in the phone's browser which tells the phone to identify its location. This information is automatically displayed on the controller's map. Once the location is identified resources can be deployed.

## VIEW RANGER

View Ranger is a digital mapping application that works by utilising the built-in GPS receiver in a smartphone or tablet. View Ranger shows the user's location plus other data such as altitude and grid reference, and can record the track taken and save waypoints. To assist Mountain Rescue teams, View Ranger have allowed all team members throughout the UK to download their maps free of charge. These digital maps allow dog handlers and search group personnel to accurately track their routes. On completion of an incident, routes can be downloaded to a master log for future reference.



**I HOPE TO GRADE MY THIRD DOG, SOON, EACH HAS BROUGHT ITS OWN CHALLENGES AND LEARNING BUT THIS HAS BEEN HUGEY REWARDING. WE HAVE A GREAT TEAM OF TRAINERS AND A HUGE AMOUNT OF ENTHUSIASM AND EXPERIENCE IN THE ASSOCIATION SO THERE IS ALWAYS SOMEONE TO TALK THINGS THROUGH WITH. AS A VET I TOO CAN GIVE ADVICE ON ANY INJURIES OR HEALTH ISSUES DOGS MAY DEVELOP TO ENABLE THEM TO HAVE A HAPPY, HEALTHY AND EFFECTIVE WORKING CAREER.** Catherine Jones, dog handler and honorary vet



# VITAL SUPPORT



Tina Page - fundraiser and supporter

As a voluntary organisation the association has relied on donations and support from individuals and groups to successfully operate. This has come in the form of sponsorship, legacies and fundraising efforts. One recent supporter has created a memorable challenge with which to support both mountain rescue and the search dogs. Tina Page introduced herself as follows:

'I originally began fundraising on a record setting 500 mile adventure run from Snowdon's summit to the roof of Britain, Ben Nevis. On the way I took in a little jog over England's highest mountain, Scafell Pike. This alternative National 3 Peaks Challenge was, I hoped, both a way to promote outdoor challenges in a more immersive, less impactful way and to draw attention to the incredible work of these volunteer organisations. It did leave me with a feeling I could do more, both in fundraising and promoting our incredible hills and the tradition of Mountain Rescue and search dogs in the British Isles that we should all protect and treasure'.





'So the *Running the Summits* challenge was born, from an idea, an inspiration and likely a few too many beers! Little did I know that this fundraising challenge to run 1000 mountains of the British Isles would completely take over my life. I discovered just how much wild landscape and rarely visited places we have. I have weathered storms, snow, ice and even drought on our misty moors and gnarly crags. My relationship with mountains has certainly evolved as they have provided fear, joy, frustration, irritation, peace and ultimately a heart tugging love for the hills.

The most wonderful and unexpected joy of the journey has come from the incredible people I have met along the way. I have visited teams around the country and been a dogsbody at search dog training courses. I would like to thank all those who have helped, supported and made donations to this challenge'.



At the height of the coronavirus crisis, rescue teams across the country began to struggle with payments towards fixed term and running costs. MRSDE put

together a fundraising marathon challenge within the organisation and raised a significant amount which was distributed to teams throughout England & Wales. As the lockdown continued this was followed by a virtual walking challenge of the 4,700 miles to Mount Everest, several ascents to the summit and a return back to the UK for good measure!

A number of pet food suppliers and equipment manufacturers have supported SARDA over the years. Apart from those already mentioned, Burns Petfoods became the MRSDE pet food partner at the start of 2020, providing high quality complimentary dog food to all graded dogs and nutritional advice for dogs at all stages. Prior to this a similar relationship existed for over 10 years with Oscar Petfoods. Boggs Wellies have supported us most generously and keep handlers' feet both warm and dry!

Our growing social media presence encourages and makes contact with a broader audience with which we are currently exploring the potential for the new fundraising opportunities and connections.



Another summit completed

## >> YOUR SUPPORT

A full range of ways in which you can support MRSDE can be viewed and accessed via

[www.mountainrescuesearchdogsendland](http://www.mountainrescuesearchdogsendland)



 Ted is  
# POWERED by BURNS



HYPOALLERGENIC



PROMOTES  
HEALTHY COAT



NATURAL  
INGREDIENTS



HIGHLY  
DIGESTIBLE



SIMPLE  
RECIPE



LOW FEEDING  
COSTS



**BURNS**  
NATURAL FOOD FOR PETS

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*John Burns*  
BVMS (MRCVS)

Call our Nutrition Team on 0800 083 6696

Visit our website [burnspet.co.uk](http://burnspet.co.uk)

# YOUR SUPPORT



## WHERE CAN I FIND OUT MORE ?

The MRSDE website

[www.mountainrescuesearchdogsendland.org.uk](http://www.mountainrescuesearchdogsendland.org.uk)

[facebook.com/MRSearchDogsEng](https://facebook.com/MRSearchDogsEng)

[twitter.com/MRSearchDogsEng](https://twitter.com/MRSearchDogsEng)

[instagram.com/k9mountainrescue](https://instagram.com/k9mountainrescue)



## HOW CAN I SUPPORT ?

There are several ways to make donations on the Ways to Help - Fundraising page on the website or contact the treasurer: [treasurer@mrsde.org.uk](mailto:treasurer@mrsde.org.uk)

## CAN I GET INVOLVED ?

Visit the Ways to Help on the website - Dogsbodies page for information as to how you can actively help with MRSDE

## HOW CAN I STAY INFORMED ?

Regular information and updates are posted on the website, on Facebook, via Twitter or Instagram



## THE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT



Brian Allport being interviewed  
by Ellie Sherwin during 2020

## SEARCH DOG TALES



At the assessment course in the Lake District in 2019 the beginnings of an oral history project was tried out using equipment loaned from the Lakeland based Mountain Heritage Trust.

A series of interviews are being recorded which will represent all aspects of this organisation: from handlers to bodies - fundraisers to sponsors.

*Telling Tales* will come together throughout 2021 to form an archive during the 50th anniversary year of the organisation. The aim is then to share these files with MREW and BMC links so that they can be heard and understood alongside the greater family of rescue services and mountain lovers in the future.

The increased use of and familiarity with Zoom technology has enabled the project to continue with home based participants. These interviews will record a wealth of knowledge and experience up to the present day.



**I OWE MY LIFE TO MISTY.  
HAD SHE NOT FOUND ME, IT IS UNLIKELY I  
WOULD BE HERE TODAY... LOOKING FORWARD  
TO GETTING MARRIED NEXT YEAR.**

Kelly from Durham was found unconscious in woodland by Misty and her handler Des Toward.



**DOGS ARE IMPORTANT FOR FINDING  
CASUALTIES IN ANY TYPE OF TERRAIN,  
ESPECIALLY REMOTE LOCATIONS.  
THESE DOGS ARE HIGHLY TRAINED TO  
EFFICIENTLY AND QUICKLY LOCATE MISSING  
PEOPLE OR CASUALTIES, WHICH CAN MEAN  
SAVING A LIFE. PLEASE SUPPORT THE  
ESSENTIAL WORK THEY DO**



Alan Hinkes OBE, MRSDE Patron

# MRSDE MEMBERS 2021

There have been over 238 dog handlers and 316 operational search dogs in England since the formation of the association 50 years ago. On 1.1.2021 there were 26 operational dogs on call and 23 dogs in training.

## Handler/ Dog

Brian Allport and Tess  
Tim Cain and Cassie  
Paul Fell and Blythe  
Tony High and Chief  
Paul Mitchinson and Roy  
Mike Needham and Tarn  
Ian Speirs and Olly  
Ian Thompson and Ben  
Pete Thompson and Rona  
Des Toward and Wisp

Andy Colau and Belle & Kez  
Kevin Stead and Mac

Dave Astley and Jack  
Pete Farnell and Meg  
Gary Smith and Orion  
Dave Warden and Wynn

Paul Bartram and Flo  
Ian Bunting and Bolt  
Ian Burley and KT  
Paul Besley and Scout  
John Coombs & Flash  
Mark Harrison and Abbie  
Dave Mason and Griff

Jim Gallienne MBE and Izzy  
Nathan Woodhouse and Oscar  
Nick Oliver and Lottie

## Rescue Team

NORTH EAST  
NORTH EAST  
NORTH EAST  
NORTH EAST  
NORTH EAST  
NORTH EAST  
NORTH EAST  
NORTH EAST  
NORTH EAST  
NORTH EAST

YORKSHIRE DALES  
YORKSHIRE DALES

MID PENNINE  
MID PENNINE  
MID PENNINE  
MID PENNINE

PEAK DISTRICT  
PEAK DISTRICT  
PEAK DISTRICT  
PEAK DISTRICT  
PEAK DISTRICT  
PEAK DISTRICT  
PEAK DISTRICT

SOUTH WEST  
SOUTH WEST  
SOUTH WEST

## Handler/ Trainee Dog

Karen Fisher and Guss  
Andrew Jenkins and Bramble  
Pete Mounsey and Oscar  
Paul Renwick and Ceb  
Claire Starkey and Bracken  
Chris Tate and Flynn

Steve Garofalo and Rolf  
Dave Astley and Tess  
Andy Holland and Bill  
John Wood and Willow

Ian Bunting and Stan  
John Coombs and Dottie  
Mark Harrison and Izzy  
Paul Bartram and Hope

Graham Adnitt and Pip  
Nick Clark and Jess  
Catherine Davis and Jack  
Jenny Doe and Angus  
Rob Heath and Brook,  
Paula Holbrook and Amber  
Catherine Jones and Copper  
Chris Tuckett and Binnie  
Mathew Stone and Merryn





Then and now, two Jims - Jim Coyle and  
Jim Gallienne - separated by 50 years

# A FOND FAREWELL

Dr. Hamish MacInnes OBE, BEM  
Patron of SARDA/ MRSDE 2008 - 2020

From an early age Hamish had an affinity to dogs and they to him. During his national service he discovered the remarkable possibilities of using dogs for search and rescue which ultimately led to the formation of SARDA.



Neville Sharp BEM, MSc.  
President of SARDA/ MRSDE 2001 - 2021

Following completion, as we awaited the printing of this anniversary booklet our President and co-author Neville Sharp passed away peacefully at home in Brighouse, West Yorkshire.

Neville approached this task with characteristic dedication and enthusiasm, throughout the months of the pandemic and brought together this reflection of the past 50 years that you are now reading.

His friendship with the members past and present, involvement in all aspects of training and search work with dogs and forensic attention to detail were all brought into play as the story began to take shape. He relished a challenge and this year he was presented with more than one to steer through with typical modesty and dignity. As President his priority was always to thank the bodies first and foremost - without which there would be no training and without training no honing of skills. He gave of his experience, time and expertise to help others achieve with their dogs and was already looking forward to the next half century of search dogs.





# Stay safe and enjoy the fells



**Thankyou to the many dogsbodies and supporters all providing invaluable assistance in the training of our dogs on a weekly basis and to family and associates past and present who have supported this voluntary organisation.**

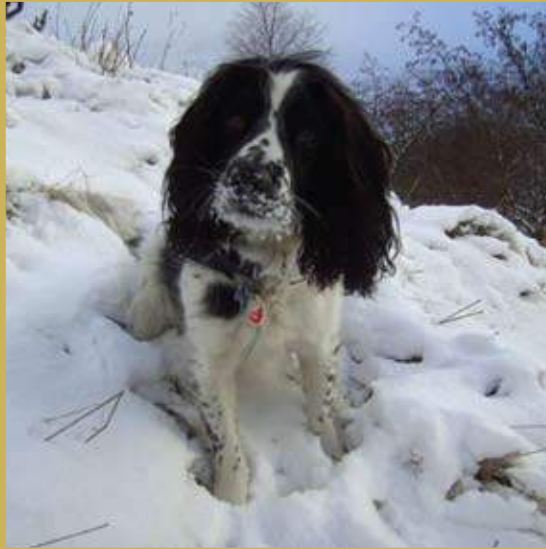


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**SUDDENLY FROM NOWHERE ... THIS SPANIEL DOG APPEARED,  
STARTED BARKING AND JUMPING ALL AROUND. IT WAS A  
GREAT FEELING OF WARMTH AND RELIEF... TOBY WAS MY  
SAVIOUR AND I OWE MY LIFE TO HIM THAT NIGHT.  
WHAT AN AMAZING DOG. I SHALL NEVER FORGET HIM.**

Ivan Simcock recalling being found in a 'white out' by Toby  
on the summit of Bleaklow Stones, Peak District  
around 3am on 4th February 2012



**[www.mountainrescuesearchdogsendland.org.uk](http://www.mountainrescuesearchdogsendland.org.uk)**

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