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THE Scots MAGAZINE

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MOUNTAIN HEROES

What it takes to join the
remarkable men and women
of Scottish Mountain Rescue



DANNY MACASKILL

Exclusive interview as the stunt
cyclist joins Celtic Connections
for an unforgettable show

HIKE | BIKE | CLIMB | EXPLORE

Outdoor Scotland

Get out there and try something new...



Eag Dhubh, on the dramatic Beinn Alligin, deep in Torridon. See Cameron McNeish, page 74

◆ Mountain Rescue p66 ◆ Take A Hike p70 ◆ On Your Bike p72 ◆ Gear Review p83

Picture: ALAMY

The Heroes Of Mountain Rescue



After 40 years' involvement in gruelling rescues, the former Lomond team leader asks what moves volunteers to sign up

by BOB SHARP

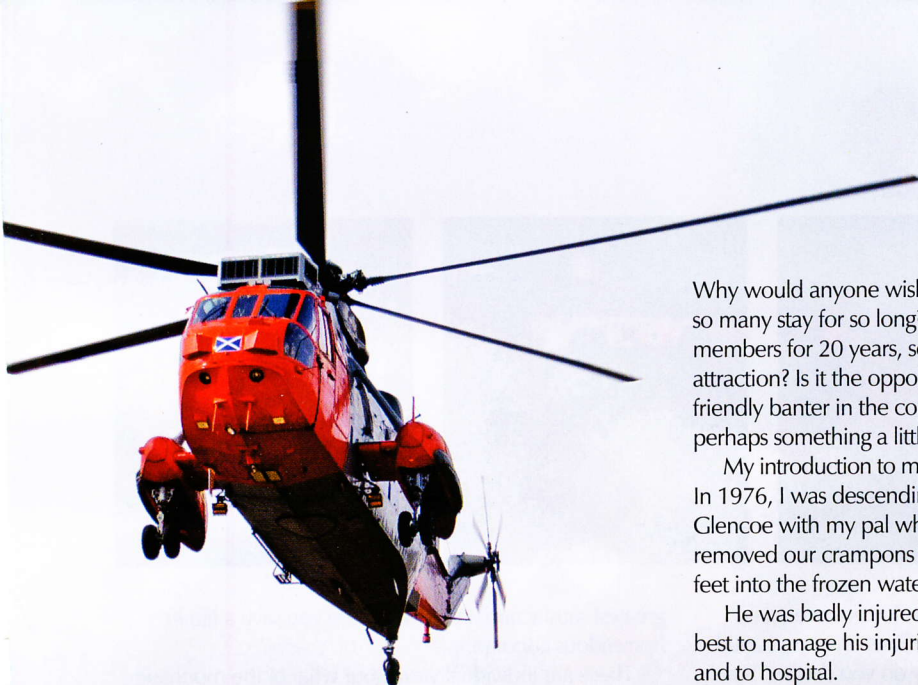
VOLUNTEERS wanted for hazardous rescues. Ever present risk to life and limb. Long periods spent at night in appalling weather. Clothes, footwear and gear trashed. Personal and social life suspended for long periods. No payment for effort, and recognition in the event of success doubtful."

Imagine reading this advert. Would you be attracted to join your local

Mountain Rescue Funding

Scottish Mountain Rescue is made up of 23 teams based throughout Scotland from Assynt to Galloway and comprises of more than 800 volunteers. It has charitable status (SC045003) and is funded almost entirely through voluntary contributions.

To donate, go to
www.scottishmountainrescue.org/donate-to-scottish-mountain-rescue



mountain rescue team? It doesn't sound like a pleasant job. Indeed, there are numerous negatives.

Many rescues take place in the dark when the weather is so bad most sensible people wouldn't consider venturing out. Call-outs often occur at inconvenient times – typically coinciding with a family anniversary! – or during the day when work beckons. Rescuers commit to give a vast amount of their time each year; there is the ever-present risk to life and limb plus the stress that invariably accompanies a tragic incident.

Yet almost 1000 people are involved in Scottish mountain rescue and there is no shortage of newcomers.

Why would anyone wish to be involved, and why would so many stay for so long? A large majority remain members for 20 years, some a lot longer. What's the attraction? Is it the opportunity for discounted gear and friendly banter in the company of like-minded souls... or perhaps something a little deeper?

My introduction to mountain rescue was serendipitous. In 1976, I was descending Stob Coire nam Beith in Glencoe with my pal when he slipped on verglas – we'd removed our crampons too early – and fell hundreds of feet into the frozen waters of the Allt Coire nam Beithach.

He was badly injured and semi-conscious but I did my best to manage his injuries and drag him off the mountain and to hospital.

In the days following, I questioned why we didn't call out the Glencoe team. I began to think about the mountain rescue service, what it does and who is involved.

Shortly afterwards a work colleague who, fortuitously, was secretary of my local mountain rescue team, invited me to attend a training session.

I leapt at the opportunity and quickly became involved in the training programme, fundraising ventures and making friends with people from work backgrounds very different from my own. It was a steep learning curve but I must have done something right. After a year I was given the nod and added to the call-out list. I had arrived!

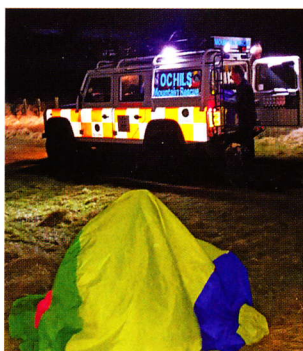
I never reflected on what motivated me. I enjoyed all the technical stuff, the craic and especially the call-outs, but never paused to consider more deeply until years later when engaged in a particularly challenging incident.

We had been tasked to search for three teenagers overdue from an expedition on Ben Lomond. The weather was truly foul with little information to form a clear search plan. We located the girls in the early hours of the following day.

All were anxious, soaked and mildly hypothermic but we judged they could walk off the mountain with careful support. »



Left: Members of Lomond Mountain Rescue transport a casualty
Middle: Rescues can happen anytime
Right: Located, secured – now to get down off the hill



The parents waiting in the car park were overjoyed with relief and thanked us for our efforts. But one stayed behind, keen to know more. "Why do you do this? Surely you'd rather be at home? Why do you risk your life? Shouldn't you get paid?" I can't recall my answers, but her questions did prompt me to examine my motives.

Volunteer Scotland, the national centre, suggests that volunteering provides opportunities for people to effect positive practical change, work in a team, make friends, gain confidence, boost self-esteem, discover hidden talents, learn new skills and become part of a new community. It's also enjoyable, regardless of downsides.

Those involved in mountain rescue would empathise with much of this. In a recent issue of this magazine Hamish MacInnes remarked, "The key motivation is always to help those in trouble. Working in a small team, often in the dark and atrocious weather, creates a terrific bond between team members."

Another experienced rescuer talked about the satisfaction in helping someone in trouble.

"Fighting the weather and carrying heavy loads when you're tired and haven't had your tea and all you've eaten is a chocolate bar and you're desperately thirsty, then come off the mountain and go home for a shower and a meal – that's very rewarding. The rescues that give me the

greatest satisfaction are those where you save a life in horrendous conditions."

These are individual views, but what of the mountain rescue fraternity? A recent study of teams in Scotland and England revealed strong agreement on a number of issues.

There's a clear feeling of a driving force centred on adventure and anticipation – the physical/technical challenge of a rescue, not knowing what the next call-out may bring, the need to take risks and the determination to endure hardship. We all find ways to break away from the tedium of ordinary life and seek a degree of challenge.

There's no doubt mountain rescue, which typically comes bundled with hardships, risks and uncertainty, provides a way to satisfy this basic human instinct.

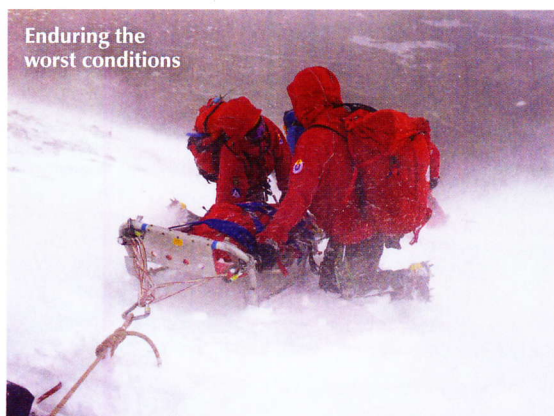
The study revealed the value of teamwork and achievement. People gain extreme satisfaction in seeing a job through to completion, playing a key role within the emergency services, working with like-minded people and achieving clear and specific goals.

Mountain rescue is a situation where success hinges on small but important contributions from people with different experience and skills, together with the co-ordinated efforts of several agencies. It is a source of great pride for many rescuers that they provide a unique service and set of skills unmatched by other emergency organisations.

Another factor is learning and personal development. While many of those new to mountain rescue arrive with relevant skills such as first aid or mountain navigation, there are numerous specific skills – often safety-related – new to everyone. In this regard, aspiring and experienced rescuers alike are prepared to learn and share their own knowledge. This is one reason why team members recognise the value of and invest so much time in training.

The social dimension is also important. Mountain rescue involves people from various backgrounds and agencies working in close harmony, often in sensitive and sometimes tragic circumstances. Team members quickly identify each other's skills and interests and determine how best everyone functions in a rescue situation.

Not only is this based on technical knowledge, but also

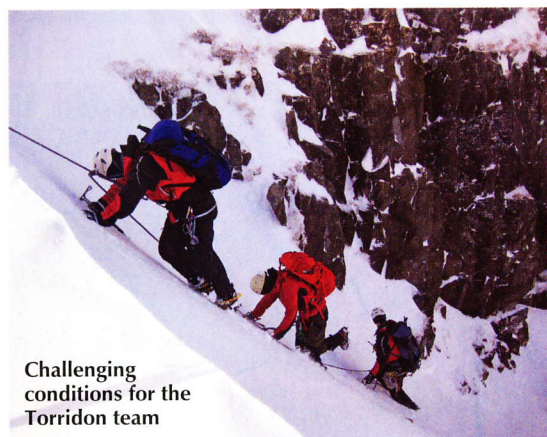


Enduring the worst conditions

**Search and
Rescue dogs on
exercise**



**Skills training
is crucial for
team members**



**Challenging
conditions for the
Torridon team**

personalities and friendships. The social context – be it working with people of different capabilities or simply enjoying the craic after a rescue – is clearly something that rescuers find attractive and motivating.

But is this the entire story? In a sense, these factors are the consequences of being involved in mountain rescue; what people experience through the process of rescuing an injured person or finding someone who is lost. I believe there is a deeper purpose that underpins all these things.

When rescuers are asked what motivates them, the answer which stands proud is “To help others in distress”. This is the point made by Hamish MacInnes. Rescue work is enjoyable and rewarding, but the foundation is a selfless desire to help others. The fact that rescue work invariably

takes place in extremely challenging conditions simply confirms the strength of this motive. This would explain why so many remain involved for so long. It is not the reward that arises through achievement, the slick teamwork and technical competence that drives people, but the unselfish desire to help others in trouble, whatever the personal cost. For me, that is altruism at its finest. It is reflected in the words of an experienced dog handler.

“Occasionally, people ask why I’m still involved 30 years on. I saw it plainly that night the men went missing. It was written in the faces of the relatives as they cast their eyes up the mountain. As we moved away to begin the search, there was trust and expectation in their eyes. They knew we were their last hope of seeing their loved ones.”

Pictures: ALAMY

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PPA Scotland Magazine
Awards



Keith Fergus

The celebrated photographer is a long-time contributor to *The Scots Magazine* and author of many guides and books about Scotland's outdoors – including his latest, *Great Scottish Journeys*, based on the stunning photographic series in these pages and produced in conjunction with your favourite magazine. This issue, you have the chance to win a signed copy. See page 102



Polly Pullar

A writer, photographer, naturalist and wildlife rehabilitator with a passion for the natural world. Polly has contributed to *The Scots Magazine* for 30 years. She is the author of six books, including the recent *The Red Squirrel – A Future In The Forest*, with photographer Neil McIntyre. This month, Polly brings you a revealing feature on the impact of alien species. See page 58



Bob Sharp

A stalwart of Mountain Rescue in Scotland with more than 40 years experience. A former leader of Lomond Mountain Rescue, attending hundreds of call-outs, Bob is a climber, qualified mountain leader, "Munroist" and author. This month, Bob's written a fascinating piece on what drives climbers to volunteer for gruelling service in Mountain Rescue. See page 66



Kenny MacAskill

The former Scottish Justice Minister and MSP is an expert on the Scottish diaspora and co-author of the book *Global Scots – Voices From Afar*, which he wrote with friend and former First Minister Henry McLeish. This month, Kenny brings you the amazing story of the many brave Scots volunteers who fought in the Spanish Civil War. See page 114



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