At the end of the European winter, outdoor brand Merrell organised an event aimed at giving insight into the work of the mountain rescue team in the Peak District National Park in the centre of England. *WSA* was there.

A day in the life

England's highest mountain, Scafell Pike in the Lake District, is 987 metres high, so the country is never going to feature among the possible hosts of the FIS Alpine World Ski Championships, but it has, and needs, a strong network of mountain rescue teams, comprising volunteers who raise all their own money for equipment and give of their time freely, inspired only by their own deep love of the outdoors and a willingness to share their knowledge and expertise to help any fellow-enthusiasts who find themselves in trouble during a hike or climb.

The Peak District Mountain Rescue Organisation covers the Peak District National Park (another favourite area for the outdoor enthusiast), which stretches across the diverse, beautiful and often rugged countryside between the cities of Derby, Sheffield and Manchester. It is one of the oldest mountain rescue organisations in the country and is preparing to celebrate its fiftieth anniversary next year. It began responding to calls for help in 1964 following two fatal accidents in the national park that winter and has gone from strength to strength. But because the Peak District covers an area of almost 1,500 square-kilometres, the mountain rescue organisation is now split into seven teams.

Outdoor brand Merrell recently arranged for one of these teams, the Edale mountain rescue team, to play host to a group of observers, demonstrating the techniques and some of the equipment it uses in the 120 or so incidents it has to respond to, in all weathers, in a typical year.

Purely for the purposes of the demonstration, the team decided to recreate a real accident, incident number 13 for this year, in which a



The Edale mountain rescue team's home patch: Millstone Edge in the Burbage Valley.
Merrell

COPYRIGHT



Team-member Neil Hayter, right, puts his faith in "old-fashioned" gear from Páramo, Mountain Equipment and Buffalo Systems.

Merrell

climber from the US had fallen from a height of 10 metres at some cliffs at Millstone Edge in the Burbage Valley, near the village of Hathersage. The climber injured his back and pelvis and, following attention at the scene from the mountain rescue team, was carried down from the hill to a waiting ambulance for transfer to hospital in Sheffield, about 15 kilometres away. For the demonstration, fortunately, no one had to scale the cliffs; the team deemed it sufficient for a member of the Merrell team, UK marketing manager Simon Vingoe, to feign injury.

Honey-pot for climbers

"Climbing is the bit that really keeps us busy," says the team's Dave Torr. "We have some of the busiest climbing ledges in the world here. In the summer, this place is crammed with climbers, as well as walkers, paragliders, you name it. Everybody comes here to play. We're surrounded by towns and cities, and we're right in the centre of the country, so it's a great place to come. We get called here quite a lot; it's something of a honey-pot and it gets very, very busy."

There are about 50 members, all volunteers, on the team's call-out list. When there is an incident, such as the one that involved the US climber, the call goes out to everyone. "If you're available, you go. If you're not, then you don't," Mr Torr says. The scenario of a walker getting lost in fog or a blizzard, which he insists is what springs to most people's minds when they first think of mountain rescue, accounts for between 20% and 30% of cases. The rest refer to what's called a known location. Trauma injuries are very common, especially lower-leg injuries; but when a person falls off one of the cliffs, they usually stay where they are until help arrives. It's mixed terrain, with moorland, rocky ground, steeper ground and access isn't always easy. If an ambulance can't reach the injured person, the mountain rescue team steps in. It works closely with the air-ambulance service, summoning a helicopter if a situation is serious enough to demand it. "Most of the time, there is only one service that can get an injured person off the hill, and that's us," Mr Torr says.

A passion for the outdoors is not enough

To be in the team, you have to be an active outdoor person. "That's the minimum requirement," Dave Torr continues. "The process is that you fill in an application to join and attend an evening training session so that we can get to know the person a bit. We then do a full day on the hill and carry out an initial assessment based on that. We're looking for competent, capable people on the hill. It's hard to quantify what that is in a sentence or two, but we know what it is. It's about experience; it's about how they move over difficult terrain. Most people who have been regular hill-walkers for a number of years will probably meet our criteria. It's not about particular fitness levels, although a lot of what we do is about stamina. It's how they perform on the hill. We're all experienced outdoor people and we know if someone is an experienced hillwalker or not by walking with them for about ten minutes on the hill. You will know. If they're not, if they have bluffed it a bit, we'll know pretty quickly."

More than 50% of people who sign up for the training programme will drop out before the end, he explains. This seems a high proportion. It takes between 12 and 18 months to complete

COPYRIGHT



Bob Davey inside a basic nylon tent that keeps body heat in and can save lives.

Merrell

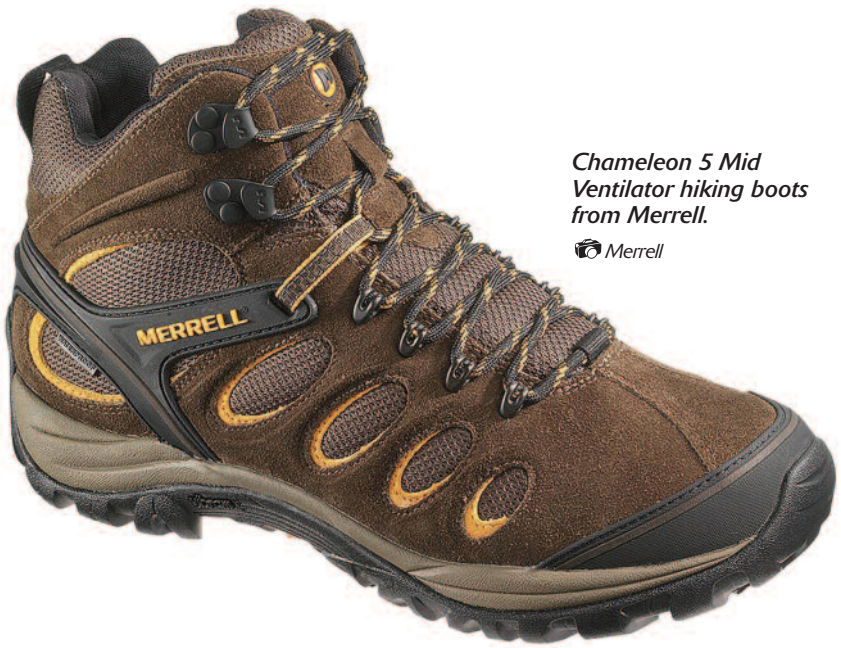
the training and in the course of that time, some very able people decide for themselves that they would prefer not to go ahead. "If we take ten people on, we'll be lucky if we get four at the end of it," Mr Torr insists. "That's due, mainly, to commitment. Mountain rescue is not something you do as a bit of a hobby. And what makes it really difficult is that if you are an active outdoor person, there's a good chance you're not going to be around enough to be useful to us."

Here, then, is the dilemma. The team wants fit, healthy, active, strong volunteers, motivated by their love of the national park. But people who love the active life too much often want to spend all their spare time walking, climbing, trail-running, cycling and so on. Often, at weekends, they will want to travel further afield and sample the hills of Wales or the Lake District or Scotland instead. And then, if a call comes to help out in an emergency situation on their home patch in Derbyshire, it's impossible for them to respond.

"We get loads of very good, very competent hill people," Mr Torr continues. "But if they're never here, they're not really of any use to us. Yes, mountain rescue is voluntary but we also have to be very professional; we have to provide a service and we have to be ready to go. We love the outdoors, too, and we do get time to go off and do things; I go sailing off the west coast of Scotland, for example. But that's why we have 50 people." One of his colleagues, Bob Davey, adds that the most important attribute any team-member can have is "an understanding partner".

Off piste

On the day of our visit, the mountain rescue team demonstrated the techniques for checking the levels of pain Simon Vingoe was suffering (or pretending to, thankfully), how conscious he was and how urgent it was to get him off the hill. Looking at the levels of damage to head, airways and spine, the team then decides how best to get the injured person down. On a cold day, like almost any day in the early part of 2013, plummeting body temperatures and hypothermia are a serious concern. Amongst its equipment, the team carries a fairly basic nylon tent, easy to erect around an injured walker or climber to get them out of the rain, snow or cold, with the body heat of rescuers or companions soon warming up everyone inside, including the person who has been hurt. "These things save lives," Dave Torr says. "They're not expensive. You can easily carry one between two. It's a bit old-fashioned, but much more effective than a number of more recent ideas to have come onto the market."



Chameleon 5 Mid Ventilator hiking boots from Merrell.

Merrell

COPYRIGHT

There are special tricks of the trade for rolling an injured person to manoeuvre him or her onto a stretcher, and then for carrying the stretcher away from the cliffs and back onto the path. The team-members line up either side of the stretcher and pass it along, hand-to-hand. When you let go of the stretcher, you run to the end of the line to grab it again when it comes past. Back on the path, a single wheel with a tractor-sized tyre attaches to the stretcher and the team is able to wheel the "patient", wheelbarrow-style, back to the road. Awkward and heavy to carry up, the wheel saves a great deal of labour on the way back down.

Cracking kit

On the subject of outdoor gear more generally, the Chameleon 5 Mid Ventilator backpacking hiking boot from hosts for the day, Merrell, proved popular with the Edale mountain rescue team. It has membrane technology from Gore-Tex to keep feet dry in wet conditions, a shock-absorbing insole and a Vibram sole with five-millimetre lugs. Team-member Neil Hayter says Páramo trousers are standard issue for all Peak District Mountain Rescue volunteers. "Not everybody likes them, but I think they're great," he comments. "You might get your knees wet when you kneel down, but as soon as you're on the move again, you're warm and dry." Underneath, he was wearing a team-issue long-sleeve wicking top from local outdoor brand, Sheffield-based Buffalo Systems, with a Pertex shell and fast-wicking micro-pile lining. "I suppose it's old technology," Mr Hayter says, "but I think it's cracking kit. And it works. Even when you're wet it still keeps you warm." Jackets are from a little further away, in Cheshire, at the western edge of the Peak District. Mountain Equipment is the supplier and the product is, again, a standard issue, but this time with mountain rescue team (MRT) in its name. It's called the Kongur MRT Jacket, based on the Kongur, a product made from three-layer Gore-Tex Pro Shell Ascendor II fabric, but is, Mountain Equipment says, "designed specifically for the demands of professional rescue teams". Asked if there is any element of outdoor clothing that he feels is lacking and would benefit the team, Mr Hayter says he doesn't think so. "There's such an array of kit now," he says. "You're spoiled for choice almost, really. In mountain rescue, we have very specific requirements. There is no ideal bit of kit, but there is everything there you need."



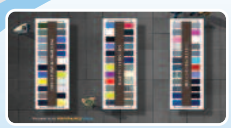
Special techniques are required for getting an injured climber off the hill.

Merrell

COPYRIGHT

365PERFORMANCEDAYS
FUNCTIONAL FABRIC FAIR

- 1st online functional fabric fair
- 365 days a year - 24 hours a day
- Contact international suppliers for functional fabrics
- First online forum with innovation and trends
- Visit today


Performance Forum at 365 Performance Days


Exhibition Hall from 365 Performance Days



www.365Performancedays.eu
VISITOR FRIENDLY • EXHIBITOR FRIENDLY • ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY

VIRTUAL
INTERACTIVE EXHIBITION