



GLOUCESTERSHIRE CAVE RESCUE GROUP



APRIL 2011 NEWSLETTER

It's been nearly 12 months since the last newsletter, so apologies for that. It is hoped that this can be published 2-3 times per year and that the membership will find it to be of use.

Please contact the Chairman or Secretary if there's anything you think should be included in the newsletter or has been left out.

Important Phone Numbers

GCRG Depot – 01594 827999

Dates for your diary

5th May – GCRG AGM @ the depot (19:30 start),
supper will be served afterwards

5th June – Joint exercise with SARA @ Ban-Y-Gor

3rd/4th Sept – Joint exercise with MCRO @
Snailbeach Mine.

Committee Members

Chairman Paul W Taylor chairman@gcrg.org.uk 01452 505673 (H) 07803 539945 (M)	Secretary Peter Turier secretary@gcrg.org.uk 01452 539199 (H) 07879 903921 (M)	Treasurer Liz Maisey treasurer@gcrg.org.uk 01666 504647 (H)
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Callout Wardens

Cheltenham / Tewkesbury / North Cotswolds	Maurice Febry 01242 242160 (H)	Dave Appleing 01242 581385 (H)
Bristol / Chepstow	John Elliott 01594 543881 (H)	John Hutchinson 01291 626376 (H)
Forest of Dean	John Berry 01594 822823(H)	Cliff Seymour 01594 832717 (H)
	Dave Tuffley 01594 824343 (H)	Andy Clark 01600 716970 (H)
Gloucester	Steve Tomalin 01452 883189 (H)	Paul Taylor 01452 505673 (H)
	Pete Turier 01452 539199 (H)	
Out of County	George Price 01531 821743 (H)	

Forthcoming Training

See also "Dates for your diary"

5th June – A joint exercise with the Severn Area Rescue Association (SARA) at Ban-y-Gor. Further details will be forwarded once available.

Previous Practice Events

GCRG AT WINDRUSH STONE MINE

5th December 2010

The entrance to the Windrush stone mine is located in a small wood just off the A40, next to the village of Windrush. (On the left when heading from Cheltenham/Gloucester, before the Inn for All Seasons).

It was one of a number of stone mines that littered the Cotswold Hills and its history can be traced back many years. The stone it produced found its way into many of the famous London buildings such as Buckingham Palace and the Houses of Parliament.

It became of interest to cavers when re-opened by members of the GSS a number of years back [*First visited by MF in 1972 but not opened up and explored until 1981, Ed*]. Was then closed again and then reopened. A gate was fitted and excellent relationships made with the present farmer / landowner. Access is available for all bonifide cavers, (Contact Jonathan, Phil or Maurice) and amounts to about 2km of passages.

So the question you are probably asking is: why does GCRG have an interest in the site?

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GCRG does not just have the Forest of Dean caves & mines to look after; its umbrella spreads to the whole of Gloucestershire and beyond.

Although, in years gone by, the group has held exercises at sites outside the Forest of Dean, the GCRG Committee decided a couple of years back that more emphasis needed to be put into other sites that fall under its umbrella. At least one of the four annual exercises should be held in one of the Cotswold stone mines. This has been further enhanced by joint exercises involving South East Cave Rescue (SECRO) at the chalk mines at Emmer Green in Reading. In September 2010 GCRG had a joint exercise with the MCRO at the Huglith Mineral Mine in Shropshire. This all adds to our continuing work with the South & Mid Wales Cave Rescue Team (S&MWCRT or even the S&M's).

All of this work in building the knowledge of what a rescue could involve is essential in ensuring that, if the services of the group and its counterparts are required, events run as smoothly and efficiently as possible.

The first of our renewed Cotswold exercises took place in Whittington stone mine just outside Cheltenham back in 2009, has been reported on previously and was a very successful event. The next stage of this work was to ask the farmer at Windrush if he would be happy for an exercise to go ahead and with this granted, plans were prepared.

The scenario was to be a "Search" and, although the mine is not vast, it is in places quite complex and with the planned date being set for early December it was also likely to contain a good number of bats.

Not wishing to doubt the abilities of those who are sent out to search, if many involved do not have an intimate knowledge of a site, it is always difficult for the Surface Controller to be 100% sure that a site has been satisfactorily searched. Also add to this that it is an "Exercise" and those running the event find themselves in a very difficult dilemma: where do you locate the casualty and do you use a live one who could be waiting around a long time?

With people travelling quite a long way to attend the exercise they do not want to be finding the casualty in the first five minutes then it's all over and done with in no time. Using a live casualty requires more people to get them into position and subsequent delays while this is set up. Of course as soon as those searching take a look at the site survey it does not take a genius to work out the location of the casualty and although not the exact location, it is very likely going to be near to the farthest point from the entrance and in the last area to be searched. This can be very frustrating for the parties that search and do not find anything.

For a similar search exercise held at the Doward Pancake mines Gareth Jones prepared a set of laminated/numbered cards and these were deployed at a variety of locations across the search area. This provided everybody with something to locate and report back on.

These cards (a replacement set as we have managed to misplace the first set) were used Windrush and again proved to be very successful. I will return to the results later.

Ten cards were deployed around the mine by Phil, Gareth, Paul, Nick and John (the farmer, who went on to pull out the card out to determine the location for the casualty, so if you have any complaints take them up with him) two days before the exercise. At the same time a few sections of the mine were cordoned off for the following reasons: -

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1. Loose rock wall climb to gain access to the passage.
2. Complexity and condition of the passages.
3. Areas where the bats were roosting.

Instructions on each of the cards informed the finder of what to do, and one of the cards carried the instructions informing the searching party to provide the casualty.

I personally like the cards as it does give a definitive item to be located, and once found it does confirm that the passage has been fully searched.

As one of the deployment team, the cards were not all placed in obvious locations and it was card No 8 that was not spotted on the first sweep that needed a second look to locate it. Not a criticism but it just makes people think that little bit more, 'Yes I did search right to the end of that passage', when they report back to Surface Control.

So how did it go on the day? Following severe weather during the previous week, the situation had improved considerably by the Sunday morning and, by the time that I arrived at the site at 10:10 (from Towcester), a good number of other cavers were on site. The GCRG Land Rover was located on the verge adjacent to the road and its contents had already been unloaded into a "popup shelter" erected on the verge. This was good as it would have allowed the vehicle to be despatched to other duties if required without further delay.

With the entrance approximately 100m away in the woods, the Kyham Surface Control Shelter had been set up adjacent to the mine entrance. A designated access route to this point and the entrance had been marked out with red and white marker tape. Sorry that I got the wrong tape chaps, but we have the correct type in the box now. Although not of the same hexagonal design, we now have a second Kyham shelter to further enhance our surface control facility. Gareth, Jo, Dave Tuffley, Trevor and Chris Perkins took on the role of the Surface Controllers and assistants. It always amazes me how many people can be swallowed up by these roles.



Underground Control

Photo: Arthur Champion

Having given everybody an outline of the site and scenario, the next job was to get the Ogof Phone despatched underground and make contact with its surface counterpart. With copies of the mine surveys available this was completed in double quick time. Surface communication was via our standard SAR frequency hand-held radios and again these worked very well.

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Although not deployed, but available if it had been required, the availability of a small surface tent, sleeping bags, mats and provisions to provide weather protection and initial sustenance for the surface Ogof Phone Party is an essential set of equipment. During a prolonged rescue, this team could be required to be "on station" for some considerable time (a lesson learnt and acted on from the Otter Hole rescue). We are soon going to see the replacement of the ageing, existing "through the rock" Comms equipment with the new Nicola Three equipment. Although it will be vastly superior to the existing equipment I can't see it totally eliminating the requirement for surface personnel so they need to be catered for.

The normal T-Card Board was run providing a dynamic picture of the exercise along with a written log. Gareth took the opportunity to run the new SARMAN software on the GCRG laptop. Although this is very much directed towards surface rescue teams it certainly has applications within cave rescue incident management. I am sure as we become more familiar with its operation, its use and usefulness will increase. The overlaying of the surveys for underground sites onto surface survey maps will be invaluable for those sites with multiple entrances, such as the Noxon Park iron mine/area.

Underground, the search of the mine workings went very well with two teams being deployed and further sub-dividing taking place within the teams underground. The vast proportion of information was relayed back via the strategically positioned Ogof Phone. In this mine, with limited length of passage, returning to this location with the information was not a problem. However in a larger complex of passages the addition of further fixed wire communications could be a requirement. Once the casualty card had been found Jonathan Maisey took on the roll of casualty and this gave the first opportunity for the recently purchased SLIX 50 semi-articulated stretcher to be used underground.



Stretcher party in the main passage

Photo: Nick B

Due to a known potential problem area being located right at the entrance, once the casualty had been placed in the new stretcher the whole thing was placed inside the normal Brecon stretcher. It is not necessary to use any additional spinal splint (as would be the normal practice with this stretcher) as the SLIX 50 is fitted with an integral spinal splint. This allows it to be used completely independently of any other equipment.

When a tight and awkward section of passage presents itself, the outer stretcher is removed and the casualty passed through the restriction to be reunited with the outer stretcher on the other side. Some degree of planning for these situations is required but where it is possible to do so it does provide the casualty with a greater degree of protection than if they were completely removed from all of the stretchers.

The underground carry was over a variety of terrain from low sections over rock strewn ground into the open walking sections and it all went very well. The latter approach, described above, was the course of action required at the entrance to the mine and proved to be very successful. It was highlighted, in the debrief, that complete removal of the lower skirt was probably not necessary: it could just have been folded back underneath the upper body section. The addition of a couple of sheets of stiff plastic would have helped to reduce the 'digging in' of the edges of the stretcher. This is a point that is already in the process of being sorted, along with a few others that the exercise brought to light.



Stretcher party in the main passage

Photo: Nick B

This is what practices are all about in my opinion. It's better to learn from a practice and action it than to find on a real rescue, that something previously highlighted has not been dealt with.

The day also saw visits by two members of Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service and one member of Gloucestershire Constabulary.

These were expected but gave us the opportunity to show them that we are a viable and fully functioning group that is capable of dealing with all underground scenarios that we may be needed to deal with.

One of the Fire and Rescue personnel is presently located at Cheltenham Fire Station, but is soon to take on the Station Officer's role at Coleford, so it was particularly useful to have this opportunity for a good discussion with him.

He was suitably kitted out in caving gear, rather than his spotlessly clean fire kit. He informed us he would get into a lot of hot water if he took that back dirty! He was taken underground by Phil Howells. This not only provided him with the chance to see the underground environment but also to see group members in action.

The greater his understanding of our methods of working, the greater the understanding when the two organisations come together in the future. He came out smiling and said that he had enjoyed it.

The other member of Fire & Rescue did not go underground but was given a good grounding on the group's activities and methods.

The officer from the Police sits on the local resilience forum (LRF) and, although new to the position, is very keen to see greater liaison and understanding between statutory bodies and voluntary groups like ourselves. He did not go underground but the lengthy discussions he had with a number of GCRG personnel on the surface gave him an excellent understanding of our operations. I will be meeting up with all three representatives at the next LRF meeting and it will be interesting to hear their respective feedback and comments.



Mine entrance after a successful practice

Photo: Nick B

Thanks to everybody who helped out with all the talking, to Phil for taking on the role of underground tour guide and to everybody else for doing an excellent job on the day. I am sure it scored us some good points.

The turnout was good and it was nice to see some new faces. Everybody got the opportunity of being involved and, I hope, learnt something from the day. Hopefully, we can keep momentum going for these Cotswold exercises with, I hope, a visit to the Westington Hill stone mine as the venue for December 2011, weather permitting.

Paul Taylor

COMBINED EMERGENCY SERVICES EXERCISE

Sunday March 20th 2011

I am sure there will be very few from the Gloucester, Cheltenham & Tewkesbury area that will not be able to remember the floods of 2007.



For some these memories will be very vivid, seeing water in their houses, the lack of drinking water and the loss of electricity. Yet drive a few miles from Gloucester, Cheltenham & Tewkesbury and you entered a different world where the only effect of the floods was the lack of the ability to get to those towns or cities affected. At the time, many within the Emergency Services and other organisations worked very hard moving people out of flooded properties, making sure everybody was safe and distributing water. We are all aware of the significant efforts that were put in by many at the Walham Electricity Distribution site just outside Gloucester, to keep the water at bay. Had that battle been lost, the consequences for many hundreds of thousands of people around the area would have been very significant. It is fair to say that mistakes were made but there were also many valuable lessons learnt.

However it is no good resting on your laurels and as they say "Practice makes perfect".

Fast forward to the early part of March 2011 and across the country under the code name of "**WATERMARK**" a series of exercises were set to take place to test out the local and national resources and responses to a repeat of 2007 or a similar event, as it was not only our area that was hit. Hull, Cumbria and Devon to name three, have also sustained significant flooding during recent times.

Locally, our exercise was set to take place on Sunday March 20th and, from the involvement of GCRG in the Local Resilience Forum (LRF), we were invited to take part.

The exercise was to be very much water based, with a variety of boats and hovercraft taking part and being provided by the Severn Area Rescue Association (SARA) and Gloucester Fire and Rescue Service (GFRS). In addition there would be a helicopter and also land based searching to be undertaken. It would be into this last category that GCRG would be assigned.

The major planning of the exercise was undertaken by the GFRS and in turn this information was passed out to the teams and groups who were going to be taking part. Unfortunately the 20th March was also the same day that members of GSS and RFDCC were to be going to Derbyshire caving and there was also going to be a Forest Awareness day running, so loyalties would be split.

Raynet were going to be involved to run a back up radio net should the main comms link fail. Consequently we had to supply them with all the relevant frequency and call sign details for each of the group. This would enable Raynet to pre-programme their equipment in advance.

On the day, the GCRG Team consisted of Greg Jones, Gareth Jones, Pete Turier, Trevor Perkins, Craig Cameron, George Cheshire & Paul Taylor and we all met up either beforehand in the car park at Tesco, Gloucester so as to reduce the number of vehicles we were taking. Gareth and George made their way directly to the site.

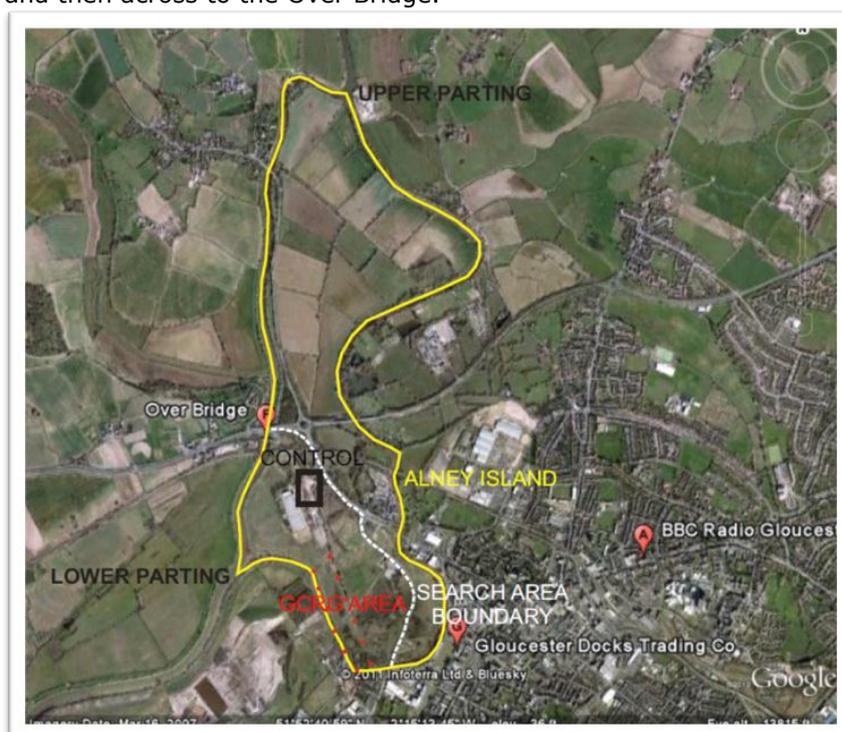
The main control was established just off the Westgate Causeway that heads out from Westgate Bridge towards Over, in what was once an area of railway sidings and quite close to Telford's old Over bridge.

GFRS had their mobile incident control vehicle already set up and running along with a number of inflatable tents and most importantly, a mobile butty/tea wagon. Once on site each team was requested to complete a "booking in" form, containing all the names and contact mobile phone numbers for those attending. This was then handed into the control vehicle along with the keys for any vehicles related to that group. This gave the controllers the numbers of those attending and a means to know who was still on site. A tally was received back for subsequent retrieval of the keys and booking out.

Just north of Gloucester, at Sandhurst, the river Severn splits into two flows, this is known as the 'upper parting'. The 'eastern flow' comes down and under a bridge on the northern bypass and then on to Westgate Bridge to come past the Quay and the Lock that gives access into the Docks. It then continues along past the long abandoned Llanthony Lock for the Gloucester & Hereford canal and rejoins the 'western flow'. This has come straight down over Maisemore Weir and under Maisemore Bridge, then the three bridges at Over. This lower junction is called the 'lower parting'.

The area in between the two flows is known as Alney Island and covers an area of approximately 3sq km. It is primarily open farmland and woods but it does contain a small area of housing adjacent to Westgate Bridge, known as West End Parade.

The search area was limited to the southern section away from the housing with the top boundary being the southern bypass road running from Llanthony Road up to the Causeway and then across to the Over Bridge.



Once all the teams were on site, George Bryant from GFRS (who had been very much involved with the planning of the exercise) gave a briefing to outline the general scenario, plans, safety procedures and the areas that were deemed out of bounds for the purpose of the exercise. Once this had been completed the incident controllers were then given 20 minutes to prepare the "incident plan". This gave an opportunity for chatting with the members of the other teams taking part and also for us to discuss our own search plans.

The day had been specifically chosen to coincide with a good bore on the River Severn so that there would be additional water and debris in the river to give a more realistic feel to the water. This fitted in well with the large scale flooding/missing person's scenario.

Two auxiliary control points had been set up: One was at the Minsterworth Water Ski Club on the A48, where the boats were launched and one at Sandhurst where the Hovercraft were launched from.

For those of us undertaking the land based search, the only confirmation that the latter were in action was the sheer volume of noise that they made as five of them moved up and down the river. Although I think Trevor and Greg did see them as they were near to the river bank when they went past them later in the day.

Once the incident plan had been formulated the next job was to task all the teams. For the water based teams I presume this was undertaken by radio to the auxiliary control points and they then deployed those teams. The helicopter was soon seen in action as well.

Next to be deployed were the "swift water" teams. They were the ones who would be searching the river banks and the wet areas that were deemed not suitable for the land based team members. For the land based teams, the remaining search area had been split up into areas and the teams allocated an area to go and search. Despite many teams having their own radios, each team was given a further radio/radios operating on the GFRS net. We were given two sets but strangely only one call sign "Cave Rescue 1" and this did cause some confusion later during the search. Two separate channels were in use, one was to be used to speak to control and the other one to speak to the other search teams.

As we (and I presume everybody else was the same) were not given the specific call signs for the other teams, no inter team communications (to the best of my knowledge) took place, everybody using the control channel to make their respective reports.

I have to say that in our opinion these additional radios did not add a great deal to the exercise, and a question we will be raising, when we have the final debrief, will be why did we not make use of the SAR radio frequencies? There were at least four teams and Raynet who would have had access to these, allowing teams to make "inter-team communications" on their respective channel and put the control communications on one of the fallback channels. I am sure this would have made the job of the control radio operators much easier as they would not have had to listen to all of the radio traffic and it would also have left the control channel much clearer. This would be easily achieved by a simple tuning of the radios to the SAR Fallback Channels. It is my understanding that this is what these channels were set up for by UK SAR. Definitely a question needs to be asked. This would also have given a direct radio link to the helicopter. It would be interesting to see if a radio link from Minsterworth to the control location could have been achieved on the SAR frequency without the need for an additional relay station as was set up for the GFRS Net.

During the search of our allocated area we actually used the GCRG radios to communicate along our search line with a radio at each end and one in the middle and this worked very well. Our search area was quite large for the limited number of people that we had available and to be honest we could have really benefitted from some additional members in the line as the area was made up of marsh grass, reeds, ditches and ponds. Although we were confident that we searched everything, additional members in the line would have allowed the search to progress forward a bit faster. The safety brief had indicated that we were not to go within 3m of the river bank and if we came across anything that we were not happy in searching (wet areas) then we were to report this to control and they would allocate one of the swift water teams to deal with it. Most of what we came up against was not a problem but towards the lower end of the search area there were some larger pools that were certainly beyond our capabilities and as such required additional help and we did report this to control.

GPS units were certainly very useful for giving the grid references for locations. Both Gareth and Greg brought theirs along on the day but I think it would be useful if GCRG had one of its own and kept it in the Land Rover.

(Anybody thinking of upgrading to a new unit: please give GCRG first shout on your old one!)

Part way through our search area we came across a casualty in the form of a dummy like 'Ruth' that we have at the GCRG depot. Unfortunately it was not supplied with any form of identification/instructions as we do with our "cards" when we are searching. Although we were able to report to control that we had found a casualty there was nothing to tell us what to do with it. Some of the other casualties were "walking wounded" and as such could be assisted back to control, or were casualties in the water and were taken away by boat or hovercraft. For those who have carried Ruth she is no lightweight. Although the controllers said they would get back to us with an evacuation plan and despite further requests for an unknown reason they did not. To be honest this left us in a bit of a quandary as to what to do. We decided that we would leave Craig with the casualty while the rest of us continued our search. Having the three GCRG radios we were still able to remain in contact across our search line using two and also leave one with Craig so that he could keep us informed on the progress with our casualty.

Taking with us the second GFRS radio and using this later to report the position of the pools (mentioned earlier), and that we had completed the search of our area was when it started to get a little confusing, using the two radios with the same call sign. In hindsight what we should have done was to relay our messages to Craig using the GCRG radios and then get him to call the control using his GFRS radio that we had all ready been using.

With our area searched we were allocated a further search area but just after this the "END EX" message was sent out so we made our way back to the control collecting Craig and our dummy casualty on route who had still not been contacted or collected.

Again in hindsight maybe we should have been a bit more forthright and requested the helicopter for our casualty and this may have resulted in a speedier evacuation rather than the protracted carry that resulted later and also made more use of the helicopter. The lack of its use was commented on in the second debrief.

Once back at the control we booked everybody back in, made good use of the "butty wagon" and then two debriefs took place. The first being a general one to everybody, including thanks for attending and how pleased the GFRS were with the results for what was the first exercise of its kind. The second was for the team leaders where the more specific reports were given by the exercise organisers and then the team leaders, this I attended on behalf of GCRG.

Not only had this been the first exercise of its type, this was the first time that all the various groups and teams had come together to work as one unit. Overall everybody was very happy. Of course there were a few things that did not go quite right but that is what practices are for; finding out what needs sorting rather than finding out at the real event. Further events are planned and from a GCRG point of view I think it is very good for us to get involved.



Yes I fully appreciate it is not everybody's cup of tea and to be honest we hope in many respects that the requirements to put these procedures into action do not come about.

However, within our group we do have a lot of knowledge and expertise and we can play a valuable part. As and when future events are planned we will ensure that the details are circulated and you can come along and see for yourself what goes on. I for one certainly enjoyed the day and the reports from the others who took part confirmed that we all learnt a lot from the experience.

Paul Taylor

Celebrating 50 Years of GCRG in 2015

In 2015 GCRG will celebrate its 50th year and it has been suggested that some form of publication be created to commemorate this anniversary.

Potential ideas for inclusion in the publication include: How & why the group was formed, how the team has grown & evolved, new technology, practices, rescues, new vehicles, new HQ etc etc. Of particular importance will be personal accounts and photographs of the various rescues & practices that GCRG has been involved with. Please will you contact a member of the Committee if you have any items of or info about GCRG 'from the past'.

A 50th anniversary GCRG logo

GCRG is also looking to have an entertaining logo created as part of the anniversary celebrations to be used on t-shirts etc.

If you have any ideas, get drawing and forward them onto the Secretary at secretary@gcrg.org.uk, there will be a small prize for the design selected.

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