

Maritime Rescue Institute Coastal Notes – 19 October 2005

Last Saturday morning MRI took part in a multi-agency exercise, co-ordinated by HM Coastguard. Involved in the exercise were coastguard rescue teams from Stonehaven and Gourdon, 2 MRI SAR boats and the Trossachs Search and Rescue Team (TSART) with their dogs. The scenario was that 4 sea kayakers had set out the previous evening on a trip from Stonehaven: when they had failed to return a comprehensive search had been carried out until darkness, finding no trace. For the purpose of the scenario it was now the next morning and the rescue effort was to switch to the south of Stonehaven as far as Crawton. The search area was to extend inland as far as the A92.

Four volunteer casualties, suitably made up to simulate their injuries and well primed as to how they should act, were placed at realistic points along the coast. Two casualties were at Dunnottar Castle, one on the rocks at the base and one actually inside. The scene here was that they had come ashore at the base and tried to climb up. One had fallen, sustaining disabling leg and back injuries, while the other had made it to the top and taken shelter inside the Castle itself, but was suffering from hypothermia and unable to continue. The other two were placed along the shore, one in a ditch at Strathlethen Bay and the other in undergrowth at Thornyhive Bay, both also injured and suffering from hypothermia.

The TSART dogs were amazing: their speed and agility meant that huge areas could be covered in a fraction of the time taken by searchers on foot. When they went to search Dunnottar Castle it only took Ghiga 7 minutes to find the casualty. However, it's a tribute to all who took part in the exercise that in 2 ½ hours all the casualties had been located, treated and evacuated safely back to base. Both MRI and TSART count paramedics among their members, so the casualties had the best possible on-site treatment before being evacuated.

The coastguard search teams also put in a hard morning's work; not only did they scour the coastline on foot, but they also did stretcher duty. After the Strathlethen Bay casualty had been found and stabilised, they carried her on a stretcher up the steep slopes of the bay all the way to their vehicle, parked by the A92.

TSART and their dogs are no strangers to Stonehaven. They have been demonstrators at all the Harbour Festivals apart from this year, when they were taking part in joint exercises with Central Scotland Fire and Rescue. They say that they felt the experience of coastal work was invaluable to them and certainly proved the worth of these highly trained dogs in this environment. Six of them stayed overnight and rounded off a successful day with a delicious meal at The Boathouse. A bottle of wine – or two! – great platefuls of mussels and steaks, and tasty cheesecakes sent them to bed very happy with their trip north. As for the dogs, there were a million new smells to sniff and a whole new world to explore. All in all, a very satisfactory day.

Of course, this exercise couldn't have taken place without the 4 volunteer casualties, who gave up their Saturday morning to lie on a cold damp coast, made up to look on the point of death, waiting to be rescued. Maybe it was the thought that this exercise might make it easier for the teams in a real rescue that carried them through – or perhaps it was the lure of the fish soup at the end of the exercise!

Visit TSART's website at <http://www.trossachssar.ik.com/> for more information about this highly motivated and professional group of men and women.

Visit www.maritime-rescue-institute.org to find out more about us.

Your online shopping can support MRI also; log onto www.buy.at/mri.

For further information or to get involved with MRI as a volunteer, please contact 01569 765768 or email hamish.mcdonald@btconnect.com.