

Severn Area Rescue Association

Lifeboats; Land Search; Cliff, Mud, Swift Water and Flood Rescue

What is SARA?

SARA is a volunteer search and rescue charity, with Lifeboat and Rescue Stations along the length of the River Severn. Teams often work together to perform rescues on the Usk, Ebbw and Wye as well as the Severn, and from the cliffs and other areas of difficult terrain, and to conduct missing person searches in support of the Police. In 2021 SARA conducted 113 different operations.

SARA News

The start of 2022 has been dominated by flood relief work (see below). But SARA has continued to be in demand elsewhere too. The SARA Newport lifeboat had two short callouts on the Usk, and an unusual callout in January saw SARA Sharpness rescuing a dog from the Severn.

On one Thursday in January the land search team had a double callout. Tasked in late morning to Cleeve Hill, near Cheltenham, along with colleagues from Gloucestershire Cave Rescue Group (GCRG) and a search dog from Serve-On, they searched until daylight was lost. They were then stood down, with nothing having been found at that point. Not long afterwards, whilst most crew were still on their return journey, the Police tasked us to a second search - for a missing girl in the Robinswood area of Gloucester. The SARA teams were again joined by members of GCRG and searched a large area of Robinswood Hill. Thankfully, around 11pm the police announced that the missing girl had been found safe elsewhere and the teams were stood down. Sadly, a body was subsequently found in connection with the first search and our thoughts went out to the family concerned.

Floods on the River Severn

During February this year the UK braced itself for a trio of named storms, Storms Dudley, Eunice and Franklin, which hit in rapid succession over 5 days due to the strong winter jet stream. With Storm Eunice being the strongest of the three, the Met Office issued a rare Red Weather Warning covering a large area of the Southwest of England.

On Friday 18th there were concerns that a storm surge would combine with a high Spring Tide and that the River Severn would overtop its banks in several parts of the Estuary. Flood Warnings were issued and SARA teams from Beachley and Sharpness placed on standby; mercifully the storm arrived a few hours after high tide and the estuary avoided significant flooding.

However, the storms brought considerable rainfall resulting in large rises on the River Severn and Wye. SARA flood teams were

deployed multiple times through the following week, as Severe Flood Warnings were issued further up the Severn.

In total we had 8 team deployments, all from the SARA Stations at Wyre Forest, Upton upon Severn and Tewkesbury. SARA stations further south remained on standby as there were numerous flood warnings issued in their local areas. Thankfully, the River Wye peaked below its 2020 levels and did not burst its banks, and the southern teams were not required.



The most dramatic deployment was the first day, Monday 21st February, when Shropshire Fire Service requested support at the Molverley area near Shrewsbury. Two boat teams were deployed to search areas of flooded farmland. Four people, who had been cut off by flood water in a house and stranded on a newly-created island, were transported to safety.

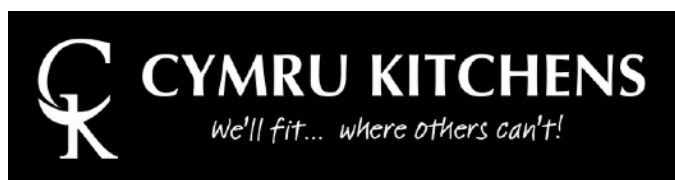
Later that evening we were contacted by National Resilience to ascertain our availability for a national response. The formation of a full 'flood team' is defined in detail, and after checking actual crew availability we were able to offer 4 full teams as available if required.

On Tuesday 22nd SARA teams remained at high readiness, with a small boat team from SARA Tewkesbury deploying to a sports pitch on the edge of Tewkesbury to rescue a trapped swan on behalf of a local wildlife sanctuary.

By Wednesday 23rd a Major Incident had been declared in Bewdley, as well as a Severe Flood Warning. A number of residents had elected to remain in their houses; Herefordshire & Worcestershire Fire & Rescue Service (HWFRS) requested that we conduct welfare checks in Bewdley on those stranded by the now peaking water levels. Two boat teams and a wading team were deployed, with the wading team featuring extensively live on Sky News and in the wider national press.



A further wading team was deployed that evening in Upton, responding to a further HWFRS request that we conduct welfare checks in flooded residential areas there.



The following day, Thursday 24th, HWFRS once again requested that we provide a flood team to conduct welfare checks in Bewdley. En route back to base, the SARA Tewkesbury team also deployed to move a stranded car to safety.

Lastly, on Saturday 26th February, SARA received a call for help from the owner of a 60ft wide-beam barge, which had come adrift from its mooring during the flooding in Tewkesbury. The barge was in a precarious location with its stern positioned over a wall submerged by the flood water, which would have caused serious damage as well as a recovery headache had the water level dropped further. Two rescue boats were launched and took the boat under tow and skilfully manoeuvred it some 200 yards downstream and secured it on a safe mooring.

We were delighted to be approached by BBC Countryfile who were filming a feature on the flooding, and the SARA team featured in their episode on 13th March.

Many thanks to all the volunteers involved over the week, and to their families.

SFRBO Instructors

For well over 5 years SARA has had a number of Swiftwater Rescue (SRT) Instructors which allows us to maintain a large number of qualified crew at minimal cost. However, getting crew qualified as flood boat operators (SFRBOs) has been very expensive, with courses almost £1000 per head. As a result we have had a programme of training up and qualifying selected team members as SFRBO Instructors, using the same Rescue3Europe arrangement as we have for SRT.

This programme was much delayed by Covid but we were delighted that the first cohort of two SFRBO-Is qualified in December, and a second cohort of three qualified in February. We were able to run our first internal course in January, and two of the crew that attended that course went on to helm flood boats in the Storm Eunice flood relief work.



Farewell Malcolm

In January we were devastated that our friend and colleague Malcolm Bradley passed away following a short illness.

Malcolm was a SARA member at Beachley for 10 years, serving as the station medical manager, as a radio operator manning the Operations Room, supporting fundraising events and recently also as a 'Deputy Launch Authority' (DLA) responsible for deploying appropriate assets to a callout. He supported many lifeboat operations from the station Operations Room and his friendly voice on the radio or cheery smile in the station was always reassuring. Whatever he was asked, the reply would be 'Yep, no problem', and that's a big part of how we will all remember him. Friendly, helpful, a true gentleman who was proud to be a member of SARA.



Malcolm was a true volunteer, who had served in St John Ambulance for 15 years before joining SARA, including as the Team Leader of the SJA Coleford unit, and served as an NHS Community First Responder. He was also a keen music fan, active as a DJ, a radio enthusiast and was devoted to his mother.

A large contingent from SARA, St Johns and the NHS attended his funeral in February, as well as many friends and family.

We will miss him dearly, as a friend as well as a colleague.

Stand down C64, stand down..

HART Rope Training

In February we commenced a series of sessions providing continuation training for the South West Ambulance HART Team in cliff rescue. The HART (Hazardous Area Response Team) paramedics are all trained to 'work at height', and we see them on some of our callouts, so it made sense for both parties to arrange some joint training.

HART operate in a series of on-call 'watches' so we are running 6 half-day sessions, one per watch, at Woodcroft Quarry. The paramedics get to practise being lowered down a cliff, with the first part of getting over the edge efficiently with a heavy bag on their back is definitely the hardest, and then being raised up accompanying a stretcher. Of course we give them the chance to exercise their muscles as well as their brains, hauling each other up the cliff using our pulley systems.



As with the boat training which we have provided in previous years and hope to run again, the paramedics value the training and make a financial contribution for it, so it all helps with our fundraising strategy as well as our operational readiness training.

Coastguard and National Resilience Visits

HM Coastguard has a statutory duty under the Coastguard Act 1925 to be responsible for the initiation and co-ordination of all UK civil Maritime Search and Rescue (SAR). The UKSAR framework is unique in that whilst HM Coastguard is responsible for maritime SAR it does not directly own or control the assets (lifeboats & crews) needed to do the job but rather is able to call upon and co-ordinate the

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activities of designated 'Declared' and 'Additional' SAR Facilities nationwide. SARA, along with RNLI and some other independent lifeboat stations around the UK coast, are formally recognised as full Declared Facilities. These have to meet the exacting standards set by the Maritime & Coastguard Agency.

At the end of January, postponed several times due to Covid, we hosted a formal inspection visit from senior officers of HMCG. The scope of the visit covered the three SARA lifeboats stations - Beachley Sharpness and Newport. Considerable work by SARA personnel over a protracted period culminated in the successful renewal of Declared Facility Status for SARA.

It is a source of great pride to our crews that at that meeting, based on the inspection of our systems and processes and our operational track record, SARA were commended by Alun Newsome (HMCG Divisional Commander Wales & West of England) for setting the 'Gold Standard' for Declared Facilities within the Independent Lifeboat sector.



A mere fortnight later we also hosted a visit by Glyn Saunders from the National Resilience Assurance Team (NRAT). On behalf of the Home Office, they inspect the organisations which host declared Flood Rescue Teams, of which SARA has 6. They visit organisations every 3 years, previously visiting us at SARA Wyre Forest in late 2018. Once again we received a very good report, and were graded 'Outstanding' in two aspects of the inspection.

With both of these visits, the discussions which are held alongside the formal inspections are very valuable, and we appreciate the support of the officers in these organisations as well as the hard work of the SARA volunteers which goes into maintaining these services.

Thank You!

As we 'learn to live with Covid', SARA's vital fundraising activities are picking up again. There have been some very productive collection events already this year including in Yate and Gloucester, and the first rowing regatta safety cover. We had a music evening in Sedbury in Feb and the Devauden 'Christmas' Auction returned in March – both raising over £2000. We are very grateful to Daz, Sedbury Royal British Legion and the Devauden Hall Committee for supporting SARA.

Chepstow's Larry Wilkie produced 2022 calendars featuring his photography of fabulous places in Chepstow, and he is donating the proceeds to SARA - £650 so far!

We welcomed him to Beachley in January to thank him.



This Spring and Summer we expect to have a busy programme of collection events and a presence at events where we provide safety or first aid cover, including the Gloucester Tall Ships Festival.

Please keep an eye on our social media updates and come along to say hello!

Set up a Direct Debit!

SARA depends on donations. A small monthly donation would help us immensely.

Just email info@sara-rescue.org.uk to request a Direct Debit email. From the link we send you, you can enter your bank details directly into a secure website.

Please don't forget to tick the 'Gift Aid' box!

SARA (Severn Area Rescue Association) is a Registered Charity CIO in England & Wales No: 1193634*
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www.sara-rescue.org.uk

*Charity 505504 prior to 31 Dec 2021

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