

Keswick Mountain Rescue Team

A Brief History of the Team's Beginnings

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When was the Team formed? – That is the difficult question to answer.

The first appeal for members was in 1946 following the 21-hour rescue of Wilfrid Noyce with a fractured femur on the Shark's Fin, Tophet Wall, Great Gable on 24 April. 34 people put their names forward, but there is no documented account of what happened after that.

In 1947, the Keswick Reminder reports the recovery of the bodies of 2 young men from some frozen waterfalls in Whelpside Gill – by climbers and police – no mention of a mountain rescue team.

Later that year, there was a search involving 500 people for 2 young toddlers who had gone walkabouts from Seldom Seen, Thornthwaite. They were found unharmed the next morning. Again, no mention of mountain rescue.

Perhaps the above 2 incidents re-ignited the drive to form some kind of organised mountain rescue in the area.

On 21 November 1947, Colonel H (Rusty) Westmorland published an open letter in the Reminder, again asking for volunteers.

On 14 February, a meeting was held at the Royal Oak in Keswick for members, and any other interested persons. So this suggests that by this date, there were already some members.

We have Rusty's original membership application form, dated 21 November 1947. What happened between that date and 14 February 1948 is not clear, but all indications are that the embryonic team was in existence in late 1947.

At first, the team was known as the Borrowdale Mountain Rescue Team. Its formation closely followed the creation of Coniston MRT by Jim Cameron.

In 1951, following a 'certain antipathy' to the team in Borrowdale, it was decided to change the name to Keswick MRT.

In those days, there were only 2 teams in the Lake District so callouts covered much of the Lake District – and beyond.

The first official callout was on 3 April 1948 on Cross Fell in the Pennines, looking (unsuccessfully) for a 27 year old man who had been missing since 31 March. He was later found on the Alston side by some boy ramblers.

The next callout, on 20 July, was to Wastwater Screes where a lady had been propped up all night by her walking stick. When found by the team, she was recorded as being in a favourable position.

Since 1947, Keswick MRT has (to date – 8 July 2006) been called out to 2355 recorded incidents involving 229 fatalities.

3 of the Team's Leaders have received distinguished recognition for their contribution to mountain rescue – Lt Col Rusty Westmorland OBE in 1964, George Fisher MBE in 1983 and Mike Nixon MBE in 1993.