

Our Manifesto for Search and Rescue 2025



All Party Parliamentary Group For Volunteer Search and Rescue

Mountain Rescue England and Wales (MREW) • Scottish Mountain Rescue (SMR)
British Cave Rescue Council (BCRC) • Lowland Rescue • Independent Lifeboats
Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) • Voluntary Coastguard

Why?

To raise the profile of volunteer Search and Rescue

To facilitate coordination and collaboration

To cut down bureaucracy and become more efficient

To better support our communities and those we rescue

The APPG for Search and Rescue aims to raise the profile of all our volunteer rescue groups through coordination and collaboration with each other, and by demonstrating the value of these volunteer services and the dangers should they no longer exist.

Since 2019, volunteer Search and Rescue services across the UK have seen an exponential rise in the number of call-outs — from the high mountains and moorlands, to the lakes, rivers and reservoirs, and around our shores. As the numbers continue to rise, the impact on our members, their families and employers — both physically and mentally — brings into question the sustainability of our service and how this, in turn, might impact on our wider communities were these valuable volunteer services no longer available.

Team members give their time willingly to help those who venture into the outdoors, on land or water, but those we rescue are not always the high mountaineers and athletes, the proficient sailors and skilled climbers of popular myth. Often, they are people just like you and your constituents, walking their dogs, cycling along tracks, with their families, pottering on the beach, taking in the view.

With YOUR help we hope to gain better recognition for all our volunteers, enabling us to work more efficiently with the statutory emergency services and Government to better support all those who enjoy the outdoors.



Some sample figures:

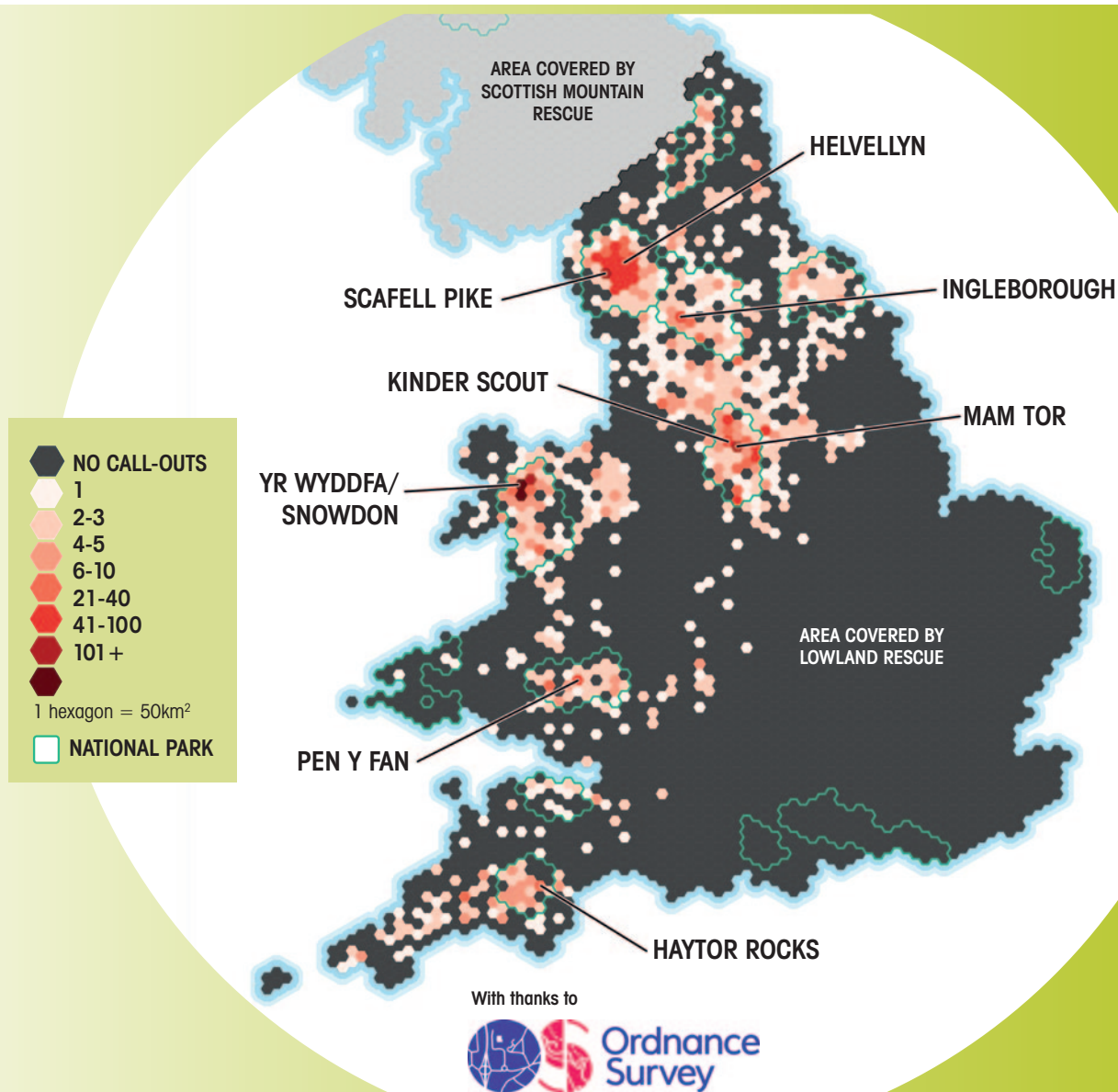
In 2024, volunteers in Mountain Rescue England and Wales gave **167,411** hours, over **3,093** deployments¹. Scottish Mountain Rescue teams reported **636** call-outs involving **29,986** hours of volunteer commitment².

The RNLI recorded **9,141** lifeboat launches, with **17,068** people helped out of dangerous situations around our coastline³.

Plus the many hundreds of hours spent in training in key rescue skills, maintaining equipment and raising funds.

Key reasons for rescue:

- Poor decision making and/or human error
- Inexperience and lack of skills in the activity
- Extreme or unexpected weather conditions
- Being tired, fatigued or unfit for the pursuit.



Key skills:

- Inter-agency collaboration
- Advanced first aid skills
- Response and off-road driving
- Working with aircraft
- Swiftwater rescue skills.

Above: Mountain Rescue England and Wales figures 2024. Graphic produced in collaboration with Ordnance Survey © Crown copyright and database rights Ordnance Survey 2025. Opposite: Exmoor MRT's swiftwater rescue crew in action © Exmoor MRT. Front cover: North of Tyne © Nadir Khan.

0 days
without
a call-out

**Volunteer Search
and Rescue: On call
24 hours a day, 7 days
a week, 365 days a year**

Immediate actions:

- **Recognise the status of Search and Rescue (SAR) volunteers in the workplace as equivalent to Army Reservists and Special Constables**

Under the Armed Forces Covenant, companies can provide up to ten days' paid leave for employees to attend Army Reserve training¹. Similarly, local policing bodies can approve payments to a Special Constable who is required for duty during their normal work time, equal to their loss of earnings on a daily basis². SAR volunteers can be called at any time of the day or night and often during their working day (the peak time between noon and 3.00 pm³). This impacts their earnings, and can create tension in the workplace.

- **Appoint a Government Minister to represent and work with the volunteer Search and Rescue organisations**

A designated Government Minister would provide a Single Point of Contact in Westminster, able to navigate the legal and procedural complexities of Government, and lobby on behalf of all our member organisations.

- **Establish Value Added Tax (VAT) exemption for all recognised Search and Rescue vehicles**

Alongside insurance, and the technical rescue equipment required to do the job, the greatest financial cost to any SAR team is in their vehicles. Teams deploy a number of vehicles, fulfilling a range of purposes, including team member response, casualty transport and communications 'control' centres. VAT exemption would substantially reduce the cost of purchase and commissioning of these vehicles.

- **Establish exemption from Vehicle Excise Duty (VED) exemption for all Search and Rescue vehicles**

The DVLA currently exempts 'Emergency vehicles' from VED, specifically, Ambulance, Fire and Rescue, Mine Rescue, Lifeboat Haulage, Lighthouse Authority and the Police⁴. Search and Rescue teams act under the auspices of the Police and removal of this tax would substantially reduce the financial burden on teams.

- **Bring the insurances required for volunteer Search and Rescue teams under Crown Indemnity**

Insurance represents a significant cost to our volunteer SAR teams. Bringing teams under Crown indemnity for the purpose of insurance would help reduce costs and provide peace of mind in the operational environment.

- **Provide support and endorsement for safety messaging in the outdoors, both to the wider public and outdoor organisations**

During and since the Covid-19 pandemic, Government bodies such as Natural England have encouraged people to spend more time in the outdoors and to connect with nature. In consequence, we have seen a substantial increase in visitors who might not otherwise have ventured into the outdoor environment — and who do so with less understanding of the risks involved, or knowledge of the skills required. This has contributed to a significant rise in calls to volunteer Search and Rescue teams. We recognise that incident numbers will continue to rise and believe safety messaging is key to mitigating the risks involved, giving people the information they need to keep themselves safe and enjoy the outdoors.

- **Provide support and endorsement with initiatives aimed at addressing the challenges facing Search and Rescue volunteers**

We ask that you recognise the challenges involved and the impact this has on our members' mental health and wellbeing — and support our desire to continue serving our communities and saving lives in the outdoors.

¹ online.flipflippingbook.com/view/993045204 ² scottishmountainrescue.org ³ mli.org/news-and-media/2025/april/02/data-reveals-mli-lifeboat-crews-launched-over-9000-times-last-year ⁴ jobs.army.mod.uk/army-reserve/life-in-the-army-reserve/day-job ⁵ policed.org/media/17741/know-your-rights-specials.pdf ⁶ ordnancesurvey.co.uk/news/18-to-24-biggest-age-group-in-need-of-rescuing ⁷ gov.uk/vehicle-exempt-from-vehicle-tax



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