

## Teesdale U3A Monthly Meeting – February 2019

Steve Owers was the speaker at the February meeting. He is the leader of the Teesdale and Weardale Search and Mountain Rescue Team having previously had a successful career in the Fire Service. The team was set up following an incident in upper Teesdale where a young man slipped and drowned while crossing Maize beck in 1968. Initially the team was based in a wooden hut near High Force but after a huge fund-raising exercise was able to build a new rescue centre in Barnard Castle, officially opened by Lord Barnard in 2001 as the Chris Scott Rescue Centre. The team has the use of 3 vehicles, including a very well-equipped Control Vehicle. There are about 50 people in the team, all unpaid volunteers, and the team operates 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. All the volunteers have full time jobs and meet most of their own expenses. They undergo vigorous training and there is a 12-month probationary period. The team now includes a very experienced canoe group. There is an upper age limit of 70 for volunteers so not too late for many U3A members! There is no government funding and the team is supported entirely by funds from the public or business community. The service is called out on request from the police who have a legal responsibility to search for missing persons. The area covered is from the North Sea coast to the high Pennine fells which reach around 3000 feet at Crossfell. On average the team is called out about 40 times a year. Following a call out, Steve will try to get together a small team with the appropriate skills, which will mean volunteers being available at short notice. The kind of incidents requiring a call out can include missing persons on the fells, in water or increasingly on the outskirts of urban areas. A few highly trained dogs are also available. The dogs are trained to follow an air scent rather than a ground scent. There are four walking groups in Teesdale U3A and Steve reminded everyone of the essential precautions which walking groups should take to keep safe.

This was an excellent presentation delivered with humour and illustrated with stunning photographs of the area. One was left with the knowledge that this was an extremely well trained and highly competent organisation, which had an important role to play, and was much deserving of public support. Following the presentation, there was a spontaneous collection for the team.

The vote of thanks was given by Phil Clarke, convenor of the fell walking group.

The speaker at the next meeting on 28th March is Stefano Cracolici who is Director of the Centre for Spanish Art and Culture at Durham University, based in Bishop Auckland.

For further information contact Ian Reid tel: 01833 631304

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