



## FTM field exercise—Ryan Tipps

My daily ritual of checking the weather forecast began on Monday. For Saturday night's FTM field exercise in Staunton River State Park, there was a 60 percent chance of thunderstorms. Each day I went back to the Internet to see if there were any changes, and each day I was greeted by the same forecast – until Friday. The numbers came up differently that day: now it was 80 percent.

I found out later that all 30-plus of my classmates had been keeping an eye on the weather as well, and we were preparing for the worst. After several years of backpacking in the wilderness, I've learned that you will be much happier once you accept the fact that you will eventually get wet. Too often I've seen people cringe at getting rainwater down the back of their shirts or in their gloves. Staying warm is a priority, but once you realize that Mother Nature – with her rain, snow or sunshine – is going to get her way, then you will be more productive, more comfortable and more composed in the field.

As it turned out, the heaviest rains came in the early and late afternoon that Saturday. By the time we had eaten dinner and darkness had set in, we were left with intermittent drizzle and the echoes of large drops falling off tree leaves high above. Many people still donned through layers of rain gear. For me, I was happy strapping on my well-worn gaiters and keeping my rain jacket strapped to my backpack in case the weather worsened. Earlier training exercises showed me that a loose-fitting jacket would've done more harm than good in the thick briar patches we were expecting to encounter.

Around 8 p.m., we got our briefing: An experienced outdoorsman had not returned to his campsite and had not called his family in several hours. We were split into about nine

teams, and assignments were handed out. My team of four people were told to sweep a large area just off the main road through the park. We piled into the back of a classmate's pickup truck and hitched a ride to the task site. What began as an open muddy field turned into thick woods about 100 yards away. We covered the field quickly and began into the woods as determined first-timers. Every once in a while, the skies would open up briefly, and we'd be hit with dozens of heavy drops of rain. It rarely lasted more than four or five minutes, but the rain slowed us down considerably. My foot often sunk half a foot into the muddy earth, and the suction of the water and dirt continuously threatened to pull my hiking boots from my feet. It took about half an hour to travel only a short way through the woods, and it was there that the team located an important clue. Along a trail that served as the western boundary of our search area, several recent footprints we found along a trail that didn't seem to be used frequently. The footprints were deep, indicating that they had been made after the day's rains had softened the ground. There was also a shallow bit of water, most likely from the later sporadic rains, in many of the footprints. We called it into base, and continued searching the assigned area. My team spent a total of about two and a half hours combing the area, fighting the brush and trying to maintain our organization and direction. After several sweeps through the area, I learned the extreme importance of spare socks. My feet had pruned as water made its way into my boot. I swapped out socks at least three times during the night, and that saved a lot of pain and aggravation on my heels and soles.

Judging that our task was about 70 percent (continued on page 2)

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## MAY TRAINING CALENDAR

- 11 1830-2000 BOD @ TBA
- 18 1900-2100 TSAR Gen. Membership Mtg. @ TEMS
- 21 0900-1500 Training @ International Communications Group Bldg., Newport News

**People**, if you intend on going to training, then please, please call Bill Swartz. We decide **IF** we will have training based on the phone calls. If we decide to cancel the training then we can call those who called and make sure they know it is cancelled. If you don't call but decide to go, you can find yourself the only person in the parking lot. You need to call Bill Swartz **forty-eight** hours before the scheduled training so we can decide whether or not it will be held. (757) 681-7482.

### FTM field exercise (con't from page 1)—Ryan Tipps

complete, we decided to return to base. Most of the other teams had finished their tasks quicker than us, and had already headed back out with new orders. Base camp, which was run by members of Commonwealth Search and Rescue out of the Roanoke area, told us that they were guiding teams closer and closer to the missing subject and that my group would be part of the litter rescue. So, we waited. And waited. To the embarrassment of some teams still in the field, they had come within a few meters of the subject without noticing that he was lying in a ditch. Frustration grew among the folks at base because at least three teams had been so close but failed to spot the subject. After about an hour of pacing back and forth around base, I heard over the radios that the subject had been found and that I was going to be heading toward the park entrance for the rescue.

At the scene, I helped strap the subject into the litter and was one

of the handful of people who expedited the subject to a fire road about 75 yards away. There, more people joined in and transported the subject to the main road, signaling the end of the night's training.

Although decisions among my teammates were not always harmonious, there was a strong sense of camaraderie among the members of my team and with the other teams in the field. There was sense of purpose and a common goal. I often caught myself smiling as I plowed through the thick wilderness or discussed our course of action with other groups. Amid all of the chaos and frustration that the damp wilderness spawned, the training mission was a success, and I believe I walked away with a solid foundation of preparedness to apply to real-life scenarios in the future.

### Mark Gleason in the News—Kevin Brewer



*(Photo by Sarah A. Reid)*

A group of searchers and sign cutters investigate what was believed to be a bare human footprint near a creek. They were looking for Fleta and Bennie Gerald McMorris, an elderly Pennsylvania couple that had gone missing Friday in Albemarle County. The couple was found separately, but alive, Saturday. The sign cutters, who look for clues such as broken branches and footprints to indicate where a person has traveled, said they thought the print predated the search for the couple.

This article was copied from Winchester Star newspaper website.

Mark participated in medical treatment of the first subject (Male) as well as one of two individuals on belaying the semi-tech litter team.

## LEADERS VIEW—Kevin Brewer

To all of those who will maybe sometimes come to a training. In case you were not aware of the training announcement in April, you were asked to respond whether or not you were going to attend the training on Saturday the 22<sup>nd</sup>. Only 60% of you replied either way. The group is watching and counting, we are obligated to. You are obligated to attend the meetings and participate in the training being offered and we are obligated to gauge your participation. Some of you have not done anything with the group since sometime last year. This is unacceptable as you can surmise; you joined the group knowing the attendance requirements and for some reason you have allowed that commitment to fade. We (the BOD and Officers) would like to know why. If changes in your life have altered your

ability to participate then just let us know. Not saying anything either way can only lead us to one conclusion. Some of you who fall into this category have a group pager. If you are not going to use it then please return it ASAP so that we can issue it to those who would be better able to respond. We've had a number of searches so far this year, some of them a short distance away, but also a couple here in our own back yard (so to speak). They've been on almost every day of the week, including weekends, and we have still had a very limited response by TSAR. What's up? A committee is forming to address these issues and more within the group. So don't be surprised when you receive a phone call or email asking.....What's up?

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## Onward to Brown's Gap—Nathan Brown

As I hear the alarm clock going off at 6:30am, I try to remind myself why I am getting up so early on a Saturday morning. Am I to go to work? Well that would make sense we are very busy. No something else has started the blood flowing, training day with the search and rescue team. We have just come off of a general membership meeting on Thursday night and a K-9 training session on Friday night moving to today for a "be prepared for anything" training session with TSAR. I finally pull myself up with plenty of time to spare to make the training area in Newport News.

7:10am the phone rings T. Crossland comes across the caller ID. Not registering the name fast enough we screen the call. Then the word comes through "you have a real call out." I call Dispatch back immediately (Theresa Crossland) and get the information or as much as could be given at the time. A Pennsylvanian elderly couple is lost up near Brown's gap. Directions to base camp and a quick run down of the pager net so I could report in. I also found out John and Barbara Shortt is spooling up as well. A quick phone call over to the Shortt's to confirm they were going and to arrange a meeting place so we could follow each other up to base camp.

Now the blood gets flowing. I had just been trained COQ not three weeks prior, to help support TSAR members if the time had arises. I scurried about collecting my gear turning to the weather channel to take a glimpse of the day (rain, rain, and more rain). Well, at least I knew going into it I was going to be wet all day, spare dry clothes for the trip home and if the search was going to be longer then one day. After a four-hour drive, shooting back home for a hot meal and dry clothes would be out of the question.

Sleeping bag, sleep mat if I stay the night my truck is a good shelter from the rain a tent would only delay the wet. OK the tent is out of the question. As I am

gathering my gear, my support team (wife Tracie and my 5 year old son Asher) is just as pumped. Tracie fire's up the laptop to get to Microsoft's streets and maps up to try and print out a few closer maps of the area I was traveling to. While I load the truck, a few sandwiches of a good old stand by peanut butter and jelly appear, along with some favorite snacks from the pantry. Food, water, packs, radios and well if I forget it, I'll do better next time. 15 minutes later, a quick good bye, and a "be careful", and I was off to meet up with John and Barbara and then four hours to base camp. Ensuring we had radio contact with each other to make the time pass easier (which I suggest for all long journeys with multiple cars rolling together.)

Meeting up with the Shortt's, I call into dispatch and code in 111\*35 I was officially on the clock for my first call out. I wasn't too concerned with the terrain we were going to, I had been many of nights and days in the woods and mountains of New York and Vermont. This area would hold some of the same terrain and would make me feel at home. My mind was checking my gear and things that you need verses the luxury's and nice to have's. Well this is bad, can't get there if you don't have the directions from dispatch. The maps printed out didn't show the best detail and I was going to feel better if I had a copy of my own you know, just in case. A quick call back to the support group and the support group comes through again with a voicemail back with the information given to me from dispatch.

Three and a half hours later on the back mountain roads we start wondering about the accuracy of the directions given to the dispatch to forward to us, just as the Shortt's got turned around to back track, a Montgomery County water rescue team rolls past us in the same direction we were heading. I then followed pursuit and began to chuckle to myself "is this the real definition of what they mean by ambulance chaser?" We rounded a bend running

## Onward to Brown's Gap (con't from previous page)—Nathan Brown

pretty hot for following such a big rig and I see before me a sea of cars and emergency equipment. Finally, I get to my first search and rescue base. I observe from my truck what the main hub of activity is doing, many people around an ambulance in and out not sure why but note it in my mind. Try to call the Shortt's on the radio but we are too far from each other for our handhelds to reach each other. Open my cell phone to find a digital roaming signal happening, well this won't be good to report back to dispatch to let them know I'm here. Suddenly my radio crackles and the Shortt's turned around and were coming back my way. Informed them I was at the base and to come on in. Walk to observe and ask for the IC and Check In. I was pointed in right direction for sign in and overheard the first victim was found and just left in an ambulance. Well one member of the group was found and in stable condition that was good news but we still need to find another victim. Well after four hours of driving, we are still in the show to do what we volunteer for. The Shortt's arrived and a quick update to let them know we were still in the game. John had informed me he had contacted dispatch back in Charlottesville because getting a signal up in Brown's Gap would be tough to do. He was right on that one digital roaming if you were lucky with the phones John and I have. I found myself in a sort of Texas two-step trying to figure out if I should gear up and bring my all my gear to sign in to be ready, or just go sign in and wait and see what is next. Well after doing the two-step I took a deep breathe of air and settle myself down and settled for 50/50. Put my boots and gators on and ensuring I could just grab my pack and go if needed. Another searcher shows up behind me wearing a yellow ASRC tee shirt. I relayed the known information about the first victim ensuring we were still in the game for the second victim. Come to find out later this searcher would be apart of our team for the first task.

After signing in we waited around a bit waiting for the command to issue new tasks and collect enough information about our victims. Finally, Command is out of the trailer with some sort of plan for the awaiting searchers. Two teams were formed which mainly depended on who had 4-wheel drive vehicles or not. I know I was ready to at least play with my 4-runner if needed too so I volunteered my vehicle to transport a team to the top. I was teamed up with the Shortt's from TSAR and members from ASRC. FTL were at a premium so our FTL was a young guy from ASRC he wasn't FTL only FTM for just over a year but he did a fine job through out the day during our tasks. After receiving our task, we became team KILO. That was a good name, kind of had a charm to it. Well we loaded team Kilo into two vehicles and headed for the mountain. A nice rain all morning had made the old logging road soggy and with the red clay that was abun-

dant in this region made the road quite slick. The overall condition of the road had a nice gravel base but with the layer of clay on top 4-wheel drive was needed. We bounce our way to our first task starting point, which was about 50 yards from where the first victim was found. So now it became even more important of our search area. The second victim could be close or even in our search pattern. That would have been great, first search first task and then a victim find. We wouldn't be that lucky. As we lined up to start the search I peered into the thick brush looking for a possible way to get through. "Oh ¾ to 1 ½ inch thorns on those bushes, GREAT!!" Time to put the brush pants on. I've had these "Wick Chaps" since my coon hunting days in New York and Vermont so I know the performance of them would do well. "Ready Right?" "Right Ready" Ready Left?" "Left Ready" Forward was the calls. Into the thick brush I go all the old day tricks I had learned chasing dogs in similar terrain start coming back to me. Except, woops!! I found my self shortly sitting on a thorn bush I only was carrying an eight pound light back way when and was a good 30 pounds lighter back then. Now I'm carrying a bit heavier pack and legs weren't ready for the wet footing. My woods legs would not rejoin in the effort for another 15 minutes as I twist my way through the thickets looking for our subject. "Tracks Found!" "Kilo hold!" off to my right John had found fresh tracks, the size of the tracks were small and the area was open enough where it could have been the foot tracks of a female. We marked the area to preserve the tracks and called in for the sign cutters. FTL assigned me to mark a trail out to the road and wait for the cutters to show them in. I knew it was important to wait for them but I still wanted to be with my first team to search our area. After an hour of standing on the road, I had had enough and radioed to the FTL to get back into the game and/or recall for the sign cutters. Well the cutters were back at base waiting to be deployed I rejoined the group for help search our area. We reformed and continued our area. Just as we get back into the open field, I hear the rumblings of a truck. Go figure, here comes the cutters. Jump into the back of the truck and met other members of what I would find out was a TSAR Member Dave C. the mystery member of TSAR. Back to the tracks we went. The head cutter of the team called in to base that I had become a member of Team Quebec. I felt privileged to be apart of this team of well experienced SAR members I did the best I could to give them facts and to listen and observe everything they did, looked at and acted/reacted. I knew these guys were the real deal and a breed apart from the average SAR Volunteer sitting around back a base. After the cutters investigated the tracks they looked at me and revealed about 18 sheriffs officers had just combed this area a few hours before but had never informed the base of their doing. Now we are recovering searched areas, which is ok if the second team was

## Onward to Brown's Gap (con't from previous page)—Nathan Brown

informed of this from the beginning of the task. Team Quebec invites me to stay on with them, which I would have done in a heartbeat, but I had an obligation with team Kilo as their team member and as transport for the team members. I looked down the road and found my team members re-appearing our task was completed. Time to head to back to base for a bite to eat and to get reassigned our second task if that is what is to happen. Thanks to the Red Cross we had some bologna and cheese sandwiches a bag of chips, Oh yea and donuts they were not krispy creams or dunkin donuts but like our FTL said any time is a good time for donuts. I couldn't agree more at that moment. Out to the truck to open the bag of goodies my support team had appeared with. Umm PB&J and snack pack chips. These are hitting the spot along with some Gatorade to wash it down with. Standing around I observe the different vehicles, equipment, and people that have gathered for this search. Albemarle county sheriff's office had the command trailer, four-wheeler golf carts, equestrian teams; Montgomery County had four-wheel drive ambulances, dive teams and water rescue river airboats.

Less than an hour from when we arrived back to base our second task was given. A couple of members had to head back home so we recruited three members of the Seminole County Volunteer Fire Department to join with us in our next task. So now we have formed team X-Ray. Back to the top of the mountain we go. We park next to a cabin half way up I get up a little bank with my four runner but the Seminole Pick up fire truck doesn't have enough traction to make the little climb to park off in an open area. They find a small area to pull off of on the opposite side of the road. We set up to sweep our grid, I pull road duty for the first leg, oh boy easy walking. I do a little extra and keep a streambed in site on my right while keeping my wing mate in site and verbal my doings to her. She shifts to me to pick up the extra distance. This isn't so bad of an idea considering they are walking on top of each other in this leg of the sweep. We end up pivoting and I find myself walking along another creek bed. I can't see under my bank as well as I wish we are still formed in a tight line and the forest floor is open or open enough to be able to spread out more. I informed my wing mate to walk the bank line looking at the opposite side as I was crossing the creek to view the bank from the opposite angle. I find a nice area to cross seems shallow enough where water intake would be minimal. Knee deep later I finally got across, the water intake a bit more then I wanted to but no matter we are starting to loose light and the victim still isn't found. We finish our second and third sweeps and all agree to check one more area that was on the way back to the vehicles. We would debrief the added area when we returned to base.

"Clear the net Clear the net" Victim found code

two, which I found out was, verbal contact with the victim was made. Wow second victim is found and she is still alive. Team x-ray hurries from the woods to the road. "We need the team with the Red Fire Truck parked next to the road to move we need to park the ambulance their the victim is found next to the truck" So we questioned/joked the Seminole driver "when you got out of the vehicle did you at least look around the truck to see if the victim was near by?" We prepared to face the fact, the victim was found next to where we had parked and now we have to hump it back to the truck to help with the extraction of the victim and to see how close the victim was to the truck. Well come to find out the victim was over 200 yards away up a steep slope yes the fire truck was parked in line with the victim but seeing the victim wasn't going to happen from there. "Team X-ray lets go we have an extraction to do," bel-lowed our FTL. Putting some of my not needed gear in my truck, I joined in to the extraction team staging area. Now let the chaos begin. Too many chiefs trying to take charge and assembly the extraction unit, I had to stand back and let the things settle down. In the end, I was left back along with the rest of the TSAR members. After the extraction team got underway, I transported the Shortt's and a sign cutter back to base so they could begin to get ready for our long ride home. I went back up the mountain with the sign cutter to transport the rest of team x-ray back to base as they had gone on with the extraction team to the victim. I was able to witness the victim be extracted out of harms way and safely transported to Pegasus to transport the victim to UVA hospital to be reunited with her family.

Now it's 8:30 pm and I'm ready to head for home. Time to call into dispatch to inform I'm heading for home. WHAT! Were did my cell phone go? Oh man! It's gone; it was on my hip not long ago up on the mountain. I pull over and shed the inside of the truck. Look around where I was parked at base. Nothing. I know it's up on the mountain I figured it popped off when I loaded team X-ray in to come down. Ok back up for one last look and consider it lost if it wasn't found in a quick fashion. I pull in where I was parked and search for two minutes and poof it appears in the dark. Cool!!! Lets get out of here and head for home. Four hours later, I roll into the house and call dispatch. Theresa is glad I'm home safe as were John and Barbara.

I was very fortunate to have such great mentors on such a search and be able to witness so many different levels of a search on my first one. Thank you John and Barbara for being there to guide the way. Thanks to Theresa for giving me the call to roll out on the search.

This will not be the last search I am apart of, but now I have a better understanding of how to go about being apart of the search. I also understand how important our volunteer resources are needed within our communities helping those in need.



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### **UNITED WAY TSAR**

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### *MISSION STATEMENT*

*Tidewater Search and Rescue Group, Inc. provides trained personnel who effectively manage, support and sustain search and rescue operations when requested. This is accomplished through specialized training, constancy of purpose and continuous improvement.*

### *VISION STATEMENT*

*For the search subject, the Tidewater Search and Rescue Group, Inc, will be recognized as the leader in training and management, providing the most professional and effective response to Ground Search and Rescue Incidents.*

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## **Quick Tip Corner—Dean Matty**

1. Bugs - If you do not like to use Deet as it dissolves plastic and you might not want to use it. Try other things like; wearing light colored clothing, taking a head net, putting on long pants and shirt, selecting camp-sites that are high, dry, and breezy.
2. Keep track of your gear by not zipping your pockets in your pack until you have returned what you took out so it reminds you to look for what you took out. This is unless you are going to use the piece of gear for a while and other stuff may fall out.
3. BREATHING – When breathing breath through your nose to conserve water.
4. WD-40 Tip – Cleans and protects your pruning shears you use in the field.
5. VODKA TIP - To clean the caulking around bathtubs and showers, fill a trigger-spray bottle with vodka, spray the caulking, let set five minutes and wash clean. The alcohol in the vodka kills mold and mildew.

**SUBMISSION:** Please submit your tips to [won2search@aol.com](mailto:won2search@aol.com) by the 25<sup>th</sup> of each month so I can get them into the newsletter. Or, send them anytime as I need to start building up a list to pick from and that way you won't forget to send them later.

**DISCLAIMER:** All of the tips I get I will put them in the newsletter because, they have all worked for at least on person. Use them at your own risk, effectiveness and preference.

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