

Wanting to join the Mountain Club of South Africa's KZ-N Section Rescue Team ?

The following information is for the benefit of people who want to become involved in mountain rescue in the KZ-N Province.

Background: All medical and mountain rescues that occur in the KZ-N Province fall under the authority of the Provincial Emergency Rescue Services (EMRS). In the area of high altitude rescues the Mountain Club has, for many years, been used by EMRS to assist and carry out high altitude and technical rescues on their behalf.

In the same way, all known fatalities and missing persons in the mountains of the province fall within the jurisdiction of the SAPS. In cases where the SAPS do not have the necessary knowledge or expertise, the Mountain Club is often asked to assist.

The Search and Rescue Team is a part of the Mountain Club of SA, KZ-N Section and is not an entity on its own. The team consists of about 45 Club members who volunteer their services for this worthy cause.

Nature of Callouts: There are many misconceptions about mountain rescue, and people should take note of the following before making themselves available.

Callouts occur about 6 times per year. Usually between 3 and 8 people are used on any one operation. Due to these 2 factors, sometimes many months can go by without individuals being called upon to assist.

Frequently and incorrectly people are drawn to rescue in order to get a free helicopter ride ! This is not encouraged and is not in the spirit of the work.

In many cases the team will fly to the scene of the incident. In other cases, especially when there is bad weather, the team has to drive in from Durban and Pietermaritzburg. In these cases the work can be extremely arduous and in the case of ground searches, sometimes down-right boring. Minor expenses such as food and petrol are usually born by the individual team members.

Lastly, in some cases team members have to work with extremely gory injuries or corpses. Anyone volunteering must be mentally able to cope with such scenes.

All members are expected to equip themselves with their own individual mountain clothing and equipment, including a harness, helmet, abseil device, boots, rucksack, sleeping bag, food, stove, goggles, fleeces, water-bottle and waterproofs. The main rope rescue equipment is supplied by the Club.

Structure of the team: There are 5 distinct categories or levels to the team.

Rescue Organisers
Assistant Organisers

Technical Rescue Team
General Search and Rescue
Rescue medics and doctors.

The day to day co-ordination is done by the Convener who is also one of the Rescue Organisers. Other matters are also done by the Rescue Sub Committee consisting of the Assistants, Organisers and one doctor.

General Search and Rescue: Most people get involved by starting in the General Search and Rescue team. The only requirements for this team is to be a paid up member of the Mountain Club. Members of the team are sometimes hikers and or rock climbers and have varying experience. As people gain experience and attend rescue practises they can look forward to being called out on operations and promotion to the Technical Team or above. The likelihood of being called out usually increases as one moves up through the levels. However the Organisers do make an effort to get General Search and Rescue members onto operations so they can gain experience.

Technical Rescue Team, Assistants and Organisers: Note that from Technical Team upwards great emphasis is placed on an individual's mountaineering and rock climbing ability. The leadership of the team believes that there are 2 platforms of skill which separates the Mountain Club's rescue team from any other rope rescue organisation. This is the experience of individuals in the skills and art of hiking and scrambling in mountainous terrain and secondly, their ability to climb Traditional rock climbs (climbs without bolted protection points). Therefore before promotion from General Search and Rescue, members must at the very minimum have the experience shown below. Final promotion still lies at the discretion of the Sub-Committee.

Technical Rescue Team

Have at least 5 years of hiking and climbing experience.

Have completed 10 overnight hikes in southern Africa, with the emphasis on the Drakensberg.

Have lead or alternate lead 2 major technical mountain routes. For example: Rhino "S" route or a route on Blouberg north face.

Are able to lead competently on Traditional climbs.

Have attended 5 cliff rescue practices.

Assistant Rescue Organisers

Have had at least 3 years of technical team experience.

Have completed at least 20 overnight hikes in southern Africa, with the emphasis on the Drakensberg.

Have lead or alternate lead, 10 major technical mountain routes of 3 pitches or longer.

Are able to lead competently on Traditional climbs. (Normally several hundred pitches at least would have been climbed.)

Can navigate accurately using map and compass.

Have an intimate knowledge of the geography of the Drakensberg. (Including the names and locations of major rivers, peaks, passes, path junctions, rock-climbing routes and KZN Wildlife ranger stations)

Have leadership qualities.

Can set up stretcher haul systems, stretcher lowering systems, aerial cableway systems, one-man pick-offs and various mechanical advantage hauling systems.

Can rig and run helicopter winching systems, stretcher down and up.

Know the call-out protocols for KZ-N province.

Rescue Organizers

They should have all the experience of an Assistant Organizer but in addition would have run several cliff and helicopter practices.

They should have been an Assistant Organiser for at least 2 years.