

An introduction to HANTSAR and Search and Rescue

What is Search and Rescue?

You might think this is obvious but to many people Search and Rescue is the domain of the fire brigade, the ambulance service and the coast guard. However, Search and Rescue is the act of "searching for and aiding people in distress: relieving pain and suffering in all its many forms". We are involved in the Search and Rescue of missing persons in lowland areas. In other words we do not search mountainous areas, waterways or the sea. Searchers may also be called out to assist for other reasons such as evidence searches or in times of natural or human disasters.

Who are HANTSAR (Hampshire Search and Rescue)?

HANTSAR is a registered charity that provides skilled volunteers, who are professionally trained in search techniques, emergency procedures and first aid to assist the Police and other agencies with searches for vulnerable (such as children or the elderly) missing persons.

Who can be a member of HANTSAR?

HANTSAR members can come from any walk of life be it a doctor, teacher, scientist, fireman, housewife, university student, factory worker, lawyer, hairdresser, anyone! It does not matter what you do, but rather who you are. The spirit of Search and Rescue is the driving force. It is this diversity of searchers that provides HANTSAR its strength. It is the broad knowledge base of members that provides for different ways to deal with search and rescue situations. There is no one right way to deal with a search and rescue situation. Search and Rescue requires dedicated people who work with integrity, tenacity and commitment to find and assist the missing person.

The only requirement is that you are 18 or over and able to walk at least 5 miles in 2 hours.

What will being a member of HANTSAR involve?

HANTSAR is available for callout 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Whilst we understand that work and family commitments are priorities you should be willing to make every effort to respond to callouts and training whenever possible. Callouts may occur while you are at work, home or in the middle of the night. Callouts can occur while you are asleep and you may still have to attend work the following day. Fortunately, many employers will make allowances for employees who provide emergency services to their community. However, it is your responsibility to discuss your Search and Rescue duties with your employer to check whether it is possible to leave work during your normal working hours. If your employer does not support your Search and Rescue activities, let us know and we will try to avoid calling you out during working hours.

You should bear in mind that joining HANTSAR will not only require a degree of sacrifice from you but also your family, friends and employer. Please make sure you are being fair to them before you join HANTSAR. If you already have a busy lifestyle with little free time on your hands, you should probably reconsider joining. While the time commitment varies, you can generally count on spending at least two evenings a month training in order to maintain and improve your competence in the skills and techniques needed to be an efficient searcher. This is on top of any callouts we may respond to.

While we recognise you will not always be available, your lifestyle, work, and other commitments should be somewhat flexible to allow you to participate in searches. Members should be able to attend at least 50% of the activities to maintain proficiency in the wide variety of skills needed to be an active member of the unit.

You will be on call 24 hours a day, every day of the year, and should be able to respond to a search within one hour. Your time at a search will vary depending on the location and circumstances of the search but could last up to six hours.

However, we do NOT expect you to be able to attend EVERY callout and training session! We do realise that you are volunteering your time and that you do have a life outside Search and Rescue. All we ask is that you are honest with us and yourself as to how much time you can devote to HANTSAR.

Most of our callouts involve looking for missing persons in both rural and urban areas primarily in the Hampshire area but at times providing support in adjacent areas. A number of those searches may occur during the night and in inclement weather. This requires members to have a reasonable endurance and to feel comfortable in the great outdoors even at night and in bad weather conditions. Searching can be very rewarding but also very draining, both physically and emotionally.

All new members will have a confidential background investigation carried out by the Criminal Records Bureau. It is important to HANTSAR and the Police forces we work for that all our members are of sound character and show good judgement in their personal conduct. Members will often be involved in sensitive situations and come into contact with vulnerable persons such as the elderly and children. This requires trust and the ability to respect confidentiality.

As the member of a Search and Rescue unit you should be aware that there will be times when you may find a missing person in distressing circumstances.

Members are encouraged to own a mobile telephone as SMS (text messaging) is our primary means of callout. We use an automated system that can send a text message containing a lot of pertinent information to all our members within a few seconds. We also ask that you try to ensure your mobile telephone is always switched on and in credit so you can respond promptly to callouts.

Members are also asked to participate in non-search activities such as fund raising, equipment maintenance, organisation, training, social meetings and other special events. The unit has to maintain its equipment, organise its own administration and continually improve its abilities, knowledge and techniques. Not everyone has to be involved in everything but everyone is expected to be involved in something.

Costs

We provide a uniform (Hi-Vis Jacket) and I.D. card. If you do not have any clothing/outdoor equipment you will need to equip yourself to the standard required by HANTSAR. There is an equipment list at the end of this document. You will be expected to have most of the core equipment after a few months. You must have all the equipment prior to going on searches. HANTSAR will provide items such as radios, advanced first aid kit and any personal protection equipment that may be required.

Training

Throughout your membership you will receive training in search techniques, search theory, first aid, navigation, health and safety, knowledge of search subject behaviour, incident assessment, scenes of crime problems, survival and personal preparedness.

As you progress you may be encouraged to train as a Team Leader and possibly a Search Manager or Controller.

Support Roles

HANTSAR cannot function without dedicated volunteers. We need people who want to learn the skills needed to perform in this role. In HANTSAR, there is a place for anyone with a desire to help.

People wishing to be associated with HANTSAR and to be involved in some of its activities but NOT as Full Members, may apply for Non Operational Membership. This usually applies to those who wish to be involved in support and fund raising activities or who can offer a specialist skill required by the unit.

How does a search begin and what is involved?

A search begins when someone contacts their local Police with a problem and the Police determine that they require additional assistance. The Police obtain this additional assistance by contacting the volunteer Search and Rescue unit in their immediate area. A callout for the local Search and Rescue unit is initiated and members start heading out to an agreed rendezvous point.

Once at the rendezvous point, a command post and base of operations is set up. This base of operations is staffed by a search manager, communications co-ordinator (responsible for radio communication) and the searchers. Once the base of operations is in place, the search can begin. Searchers sign in and are divided up into teams (groups of around 3-6 searchers). A team leader is assigned to each team. He/She attends a briefing with the search manager to determine the area their team will be covering and to receive important information such as a description of the missing person, where they were last seen, the direction they were heading, important behavioural information about them and any other relevant information.

The teams are then dispatched out to their areas. Once in their area, a team will determine the maximum distance that team members can be separated to effectively cover the area. The team then begins a search pattern through their area and looks for clues that will lead them to the missing person. There are two outcomes either the missing person is found and evacuation is initiated or the area is cleared and the team reports back to the search manager for re-assignment.

The final search step is a debriefing. The first part of the debriefing process is an operational debriefing. This is usually held in two stages, an immediate debriefing of events and an organised meeting at a later time to go over procedures and determine how things could be made more efficient.

A stress debriefing may be held if there is psychological stress caused as a result of the search.

Personal Equipment List

People require our assistance in all types of terrain, seasons, weather conditions and times of the day. It is therefore imperative that each member has the proper clothing, equipment and food to contribute positively to search activities. Effectiveness requires that the searcher remains safe and comfortable at all times. Proper equipment ensures that the team can concentrate on finding the missing person or object rather than taking care of improperly equipped members.

The below is an abridged equipment list required for individual members of the unit. Some of this equipment may, where possible, be provided through HANTSAR funds.

HANTSAR T-Shirt

Stout waterproof walking boots

HANTSAR Hi-Vis Class 3 vest (provided)

Waterproof Trousers and Jacket

A Rucksack/backpack
Good quality Compass
Torch / Headlamp with extra bulb and batteries plus Spare Torch
Gloves (We recommend a pair of both waterproof and gardening type gloves)
HANTSAR personal identification badge (provided)
Water
Whistle
Note book (A6 recommended) and pens/Pencils
Knife (Pocket or multi-tool)
Snack Food e.g. Mars Bar
Toilet roll or baby wipes
Extra set of clothing, suitable for climate
Sunscreen
Watch
Personal First aid kit
A Pair of clear goggles or eye protection
Medication if required, e.g. hay fever remedies.
Mobile telephone