

# Blue Ridge Mountain Rescue Group

a member of the

Appalachian Search and Rescue Conference



## New Member Information Packet

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## **An Introduction for New & Prospective Members**

Welcome to the Blue Ridge Mountain Rescue Group! We are one of nine search and rescue groups that make up the Appalachian Search and Rescue Conference (ASRC). The ASRC responds to Search and Rescue (SAR) missions throughout the Mid-Atlantic (Pennsylvania to northern North Carolina) for lost persons and aircraft.

As a prospective member, there are a few things you should know about membership in our group. The Blue Ridge Mountain Rescue Group (BRMRG, pronounced “bur-murg) has a place for just about anyone who is willing to help—you don’t have to be a hard-core mountaineer or devote your entire waking life to the group (although you will find some members in one or both categories.) Any contribution of time or knowledge, from communication skills to financial or computer expertise, will be greatly appreciated. At the same time **YOU DON’T NEED ANY PREVIOUS RELEVANT EXPERIENCE** to join Blue Ridge. We will teach you everything you need to know.

Joining the group at the Callout Qualified (CQ) level requires only three things:

1. Completing a Record of Membership
2. Gathering the minimal “essential” equipment
3. Participating in an introductory training

Those who complete these three requirements will be eligible to respond to searches. From there, members have the opportunity to develop their skills and expertise through trainings and experience and accept increasingly more important roles during missions.

For those who wish to become expert searchers, a word of caution is in order. Membership in BRMRG can be extremely demanding of time, fortitude, and dedication. It can mean nights without sleep and telephone calls or pages at any hour. It can mean the frustration of losing sleep for missions that never materialize. It can mean forsaking a planned trip because of a callout. Your Group membership can affect others as well—unexpected absences and late night callouts can make life difficult for those around you.

If, however, you have considered all of these factors, and you wish to apply for Callout Qualified (CQ) membership and work towards higher levels of expertise, many rewards may be yours: improvement of your outdoor skills; training in technical rescue and emergency medicine, confidence in your ability to handle emergencies; development of leadership skills, and, most importantly, an opportunity to aid others in a unique way.

**We hope that you will join us.**

Blue Ridge Mountain Rescue Group: (434) 924-3472  
Training Officer, Melissa Singh: mgs9x@virginia.edu  
Website: [www.brmrg.com](http://www.brmrg.com)

## **Expectations**

There are no hard and fast rules for being a member of BRMRG (like there might be for fraternity pledges or newspaper editors), so we've created a list of mutual expectations: what we will expect from you and what you should expect from us.

### **What we will expect from you:**

1. Come to at least one search during the fall semester.
2. Set a training goal to work towards meeting Field Team Leader (FTL) standards within one year.
3. Attend training as often as possible; take responsibility for making up trainings that you miss.
4. Act and dress professionally when responding to a search.
5. Arrive at trainings on time and on weekends equipped for the conditions.
6. Ask questions, get involved, and hold instructors to high standards.
7. Alert a member(s) when you believe we are not meeting any expectations.

### **What you should expect from us:**

1. Clear, knowledgeable instructors that are available and on time.
2. An outline or guide for each training event so you know what you are meant to learn.
3. Ample time and opportunity to ask questions.
4. Individual attention and fair treatment.
5. No assumptions of previous experiences or training.
6. Opportunities for us to learn from you and your skills and specialties.
7. Opportunities for you to make up missed trainings.

During all training events, you should be able to hold instructors accountable for the quality of individual trainings. In addition, you should hold the training officer accountable for the overall quality of training. The training officer should act as an advocate for you and responsible trainer of you at all stages of your training with BRMRG.

**We spend often 6-10 hours a week training and we take that time seriously (we really enjoy it, too). These are the goals that guide our entire training program.**

## **TRAINING GOALS**

1. BRMRG will strive to have its members be the best-trained resources in the Mid Atlantic.
2. We will maintain safety as training's highest priority.
3. We will strive to promote all dedicated CQ's to Field Team Leader (FTL) by the end of the year.
4. As much as possible, BRMRG will offer members opportunities to specialize in the various fields within SAR.
5. Training will also foster a sense of professionalism and responsibility amongst our members.
6. Every member of the group, from Not Qualified (NQ) to Area Command Authority (ACA), will have the opportunity to learn and develop through our training.
7. BRMRG recognizes that teaching is an important part of learning, and training should give older members opportunities to share their skills and develop as teachers.
8. All members will be given equal attention and fair treatment.
9. If time and resources allow, BRMRG will help other SAR resources develop their skills through our training and our instructors.
10. We train, above all else, so that others may live. We train so that when our services are required, the lost person and his or her community can expect compassionate, professional, and exceptional SAR resources to respond from the Blue Ridge Mountain Rescue Group.

## Training Levels

So what will you learn? There are five levels of certification recognized by the conference, each of which denotes a level of experience and training: Callout Qualified (CQ), Field Team Member (FTM), Field Team Leader (FTL), Incident Staff (IS), and Incident Commander (IC).

**Callout Qualified:** When you have

- a) demonstrated that you have the minimal “essential” equipment,
- b) completed a record of membership, and
- c) received a basic introduction to search and rescue

then you are ready to be considered Callout Qualified. Callout Qualification is determined by the Group Training Officer. Members who are Callout Qualified can participate fully in search missions, but do not yet have group voting rights.

**Field Team Members** have participated in approximately 80 hours of more extensive training, in addition to search experience obtained at the CQ level. The FTM Training Course coincides with the fall UVA school semester. FTMs receive training in Land Navigation, Litter Handling, Field Team Operations, Search Theory, Field Communications, and other important skills. Field Team Member certification is contingent upon a recommendation from the Group Training Officer and a favorable vote by the General Membership. FTM certification brings with it the ASRC patch for your uniform shirt, as well as a vote at Group and Conference membership meetings.

**Field Team Leaders** serve as the backbone of the ASRC. They receive an additional 60 hours of training above the FTM level and the FTL course coincides with the spring UVA school semester. The FTL is highly trained in both search and rescue operations and serves essential roles during missions from guiding untrained volunteers on search tasks to providing care and transportation for the injured. Field Team Leader Certification is based upon a recommendation from the Group Training Officer and a favorable group vote. Field Team Leader training serves as the stepping-stone for all further search and rescue training.

The **Incident Staff** and **Incident Commander** are primarily involved in the management of searches. Both positions require considerable training and experience beyond FTL. Certification for these positions occurs at a conference rather than a Group level.

Other training opportunities exist as well, some of which are just beginning to be developed within the ASRC. **Field Team Signcutters** participate in a 40 hour introduction to tracking skills. **Rescue Specialists** seek mastery of technical rescue skills. **Dog Handlers** train themselves and their dogs to work as a team to search for lost persons. All of these various specialties, like the Incident Staff, build off of the FTL foundation

## Minimum Personal CQ Equipment List

*As defined by the ASRC Operations Manual*

1. Appropriate clothes and footgear for both fair and foul weather
2. Water container(s) that provide a capacity of at least two liters, (plus any necessary insulation for winter work).
3. Day pack
4. Five large heavy-duty plastic trash bags (for shelter and clue collection)
5. Food for 48 hours
6. Headlamp or flashlight and second light source
7. Lighter, matches and candle or equivalent fire source
8. Knife
9. Compass
10. Personal first aid kit
11. Waterproof pen/pencil and paper
12. Whistle
13. Two pairs of plastic or vinyl examination gloves (found in the Locker)
14. 5 x 1 gallon Ziploc bags (or equivalent)

## Other Items You'll Need

The following items will be needed throughout your training to become a Field Team Member.

1. One pair of leather gloves, good for belaying
2. 20-22 feet of 1-inch tubular webbing (to construct an ASRC seat harness)
3. One 7-foot & one 5-foot piece of 7mm perlon cord (to construct two Prusik loops)
4. An ASRC mission shirt (Yellow T-shirt provided by BRMRG for a fee or Blue button-down shirt with appropriate insignia)

All of these items can normally be assembled with a minimum of expense. (In fact, Blue Ridge Mountain Sports in the Barracks Shopping Center offers a 10% discount to BRMRG members for essential search gear.)

*These items should be carried on every search and every training.*

When emergencies arise, any delay is dangerous. All members are asked to have the essentials and other equipment ready to go. If possible, keep search gear assembled and available in a dedicated backpack (a daypack will usually suffice) or at least together in a designated spot as needed upon callout.

In the past, occasions have arisen in which members were selected to participate in searches based on who was better equipped for a given set of conditions. It would behoove new members to assemble the essentials immediately and obtain other equipment in the most timely fashion possible for each individual.

## **Important Considerations**

### When Going to Searches:

1. Search missions arise at random intervals producing busy seasons as well as slow periods. Every effort will be made to involve new members in each emergency, and this could mean telephone calls at late (or early) hours. We avoid awaking you unnecessarily, of course, but please advise others who share your telephone.
2. When a search is in progress, especially during the early phase of the callout, communications are easily snarled by too many people attempting to contact dispatch personnel. Please refrain from unnecessary telephone inquiries during this time. (But you are encouraged to come down to the locker to watch and help dispatch!)
3. The volunteer nature of our operation dictates that members must occasionally decline a search when work, studies, etc. take priority. If you are unable to leave town, you may still contribute to a mission if there is a need for dispatch coverage or short errands within town. Please make your availability for such tasks known.

### When At Searches:

1. Our likelihood of success in any search is directly related to the amount of cooperation we can secure and the degree of confidence the responsible agencies have in us. Courtesy, competence and a professional demeanor are of such critical importance during a search that there is no room for error in this. During any mission you are a representative of the ASRC and your appearance, performance and manner must reflect that fact. Because of the importance of this matter, we require the same professionalism during our trainings.
2. For the safety of yourself and other group members, never attempt an assignment for which you are unprepared. If you feel uncomfortable with a task for any reason—equipment, level of training, fatigue, etc.—inform your team leader. You have the right to refuse any task. We all face this necessity from time to time.