

All Aboard



In this booklet you are going to read about the importance of teamwork and helping one another in difficult situations. The sea can be dangerous and sometimes it is only by people working together that the danger can be overcome.

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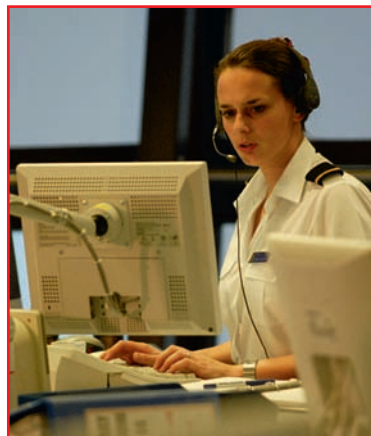
Rescue at Sea

Coastguards are responsible for the co-ordination of search and rescue at sea throughout the UK. They respond to every type of emergency, anything from a child being swept out to sea on an inflatable toy to a tanker running aground. The key to all rescue operations is good teamwork from everyone involved – if any link in the chain is missing, something that starts as a minor incident can become a disaster. The following diagram illustrates the role different people play at each stage in a typical rescue operation.

'In my job you never know what is going to happen next. Sometimes all a caller needs is to hear a calming voice, but if help is needed I have to act quickly. Even in situations which are only the marine equivalent of a flat tyre, if we don't do anything the boat can drift and it can turn nasty.'

Coastguard Watch Officer

Coastguard rescue centres receive emergency phone calls around the clock and at any time could be faced with a major emergency. The Coastguard Watch Officer deals with the incoming calls – providing the first link in the chain.



Gemma Davies
(Coastguard Watch Officer)

The Coastguard Watch Officer has to decide what action to take. Sometimes advice over the telephone will be sufficient, but in other cases extra help is required. They put a call out to the coastguard volunteers, and if necessary they will also contact the relevant rescue teams.

'When the call comes I have to drop whatever it is I'm doing. We deal with accidents that happen on cliff paths or beaches and if a lifeboat is launched we help when they bring the victims to shore. Last week I was called to help a man who had made it to shore after his rowing boat had capsized. I let the Coastguard Watch Officer know an ambulance was needed and waited with him until the ambulance crew arrived and took over.'

Coastguard volunteers



Simon Dennison
(Coastguard volunteer)

Local coastguard volunteers have a front-line job and attend all types of emergency scenes. Once at the scene, they report back to the Coastguard Watch Officer and give advice about the rescue teams required. If a lifeboat or helicopter is needed the coastguard volunteers keep watch from shore.

Helicopter rescue team

Depending on the type of incident, the Coastguard Watch Officer can decide to call on one of its own search and rescue helicopters, or ask for a Royal Navy or Royal Air Force helicopter.



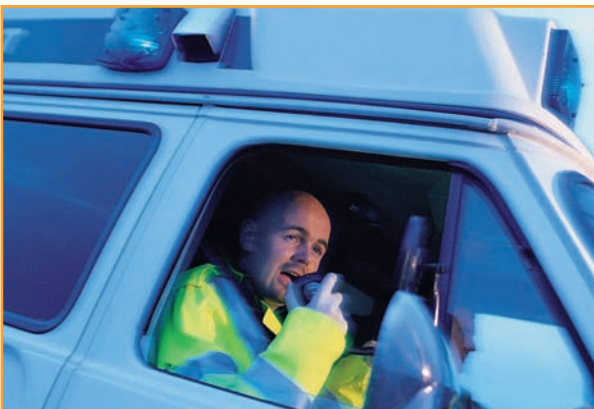
Lifeboat crew

The lifeboats are provided by a charity, the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI). Members of the lifeboat crew are mostly volunteers and they have to leave their jobs as soon as they are called. This will all happen within minutes of the alarm being raised.



Ambulance crew

An ambulance crew provides any necessary on-site medical assistance and transports casualties to hospital.



RESCUE COMPLETE

Rescue teams report back to the coastguard rescue centre and prepare for the next operation.

OPINION SLOT

Exciting? Or Just Plain Irresponsible?

This week's OPINION comes from Steve Bennett, a local coastguard volunteer, in which he shows how there are two sides to every rescue.



The emergency phone rings in the coastguard rescue centre. The Watch Officer responds coolly and efficiently. "What is your position? How many people are on board? Is anybody injured?" A small motor boat with four passengers is stranded in a stormy sea. One of them has been hurt. Once the Watch Officer has the facts at his command, he sets off a chain of events that runs smoothly because of the expertise and bravery of all the team involved. The lifeboat crew volunteers are summoned from work. The lifeboat is launched and sets off at speed across the rough sea. The sky is covered in black clouds, rain is pouring down and there is thunder and lightning. The lifeboat locates the motor boat, tows it to safety and rescues its passengers. Meanwhile, an ambulance is called and the paramedics meet the lifeboat on its return, taking the injured man straight to hospital.

Superb teamwork, an exciting adventure story and a happy ending? Reality is not quite like that. Now try this version of the same events.

Four people set out in their new motor boat. They have never driven it before. They do not have a map of where they are going. They do not tell the coastguard about their trip. They do not check the weather forecast (which is stormy). They do not know how much petrol is in the boat, or how long it will last. In the middle of a rough sea, they run out of petrol. One of them panics, stands up, falls over when a large wave hits the boat and injures his arm. The members of the lifeboat crew – teachers, police officers, shopkeepers – have to leave their work. They risk their lives out on the sea in a dangerous storm to rescue the boat. They do not get paid for this. The rescue costs over £5,000 – money that all comes

from donations as the lifeboats are run by a charity, the RNLI.

Every year, hundreds of coastguard volunteers, lifeguards and lifeboat crews risk their lives because ordinary people just do not *think*. People explore caves and cliffs without checking the tides, and get cut off. They take inflatables into the sea when there is a strong wind and get swept out. They go out in boats without any preparation, and sometimes even without lifejackets. This irresponsible behaviour costs vast amounts of money, and sometimes costs lives.

It doesn't take long to make basic preparations when you're going to the coast. This summer, make sure you treat the sea with respect.

For information about keeping safe at sea, visit:
www.mcga.gov.uk
www.rnli.org.uk

Danger at Sea



by Helen Dunmore

Two girls, Katie and Zillah, have gone out in Zillah's boat, the *Wayfarer*.

When the first wave splashed over *Wayfarer's* side, I wasn't frightened. The water landed with an icy smack on my knees, and poured into the bottom of the boat. We were quite a way out from land, now. When I looked over my shoulder I could see the top of the cliffs. The water chopped and danced, and *Wayfarer* danced too, tossing on top of the waves. I clutched her wooden sides.

But it was still all right, until Zillah stopped rowing. She'd been rowing hard, and I think she just wanted a rest. I think she was as surprised as I was when *Wayfarer* spun sideways, as soon as she brought the oars up out of the water. All at once the waves were smacking us really hard, side-on, making us rock harder and harder with each buffet of water. A big wave flopped over the side and suddenly my trainers were full of water. *Wayfarer* bucked and shuddered all over. I held on tight to her sides, and wondered if this was normal, or if I should be frightened. Zillah grabbed the oars again, dug into the sea with her right oar, and faced *Wayfarer* into the wind. Then it was all right. Rough, but all right.

"Don't you think we should go back, Zillah?" I said. "We're a long way out."

"What's the matter? Are you scared?"

"No," I said, and it was true. I wasn't scared, I was angry. Angry with Zillah, and the games she was playing. She lived here. She was supposed to know all about boats, and the sea. *We'll take the boat out for a bit*, she'd told me. But she knew she was going to row straight out to sea. She'd planned it. She *wanted* me to be scared, begging to go back.

I wasn't going to. I was as good a swimmer as Zillah, I was sure. Probably better. I measured the distance to the cliffs and wondered if I could swim it, but I knew I couldn't, not in this cold, wild November water. It wasn't a storm, but it was rough, and if *Wayfarer* didn't like it, I wouldn't be able to swim through it.

Ahead of us a bigger wave rose. I saw the inside of it, green, packed with bubbles, rearing up. Zillah couldn't see it, because she was rowing with her back to it. My mouth opened to warn her, but the wave got there first. It broke on Zillah's back, then hurled its weight of water into *Wayfarer*. I shut my eyes.

"Bail, Katie, while I turn her," yelled Zillah. "*Bail!*"

I opened my eyes. Zillah was soaked, and there were centimetres of water in the bottom of the boat.

"Bail?"

"Plastic can under the seat." She was fighting to stop the sea from taking her oars. "Quick, Katie!"

There was the red plastic can. Scoop up the water and throw it over. I can do that. I scooped and threw, scooped and threw, scooped and threw. Another wave heaved a bucket-load back over the side, but I threw it back. I was going to win. I had something to do now. It was much better than clinging to the side of the boat while Zillah took me wherever she wanted. I was part of it, helping *Wayfarer*.

Zillah got *Wayfarer* round and started to row as hard as she could, back to shore. The wind whipped her hair over her face, and behind her the cliffs rose up, with waves pounding at their base. I hoped she knew the way back. I hoped it wouldn't be too hard to steer *Wayfarer* into that narrow entrance to the cove. But Zillah must have done it loads of times before, I told myself. It couldn't be as dangerous as it looked. Could it?



I kept on bailing. Every few minutes Zillah glanced behind her. We'd come quite a way down the coast, as well as out to sea. I couldn't even see the cove any more. *Zillah must know where it is*, I thought. But she was glancing behind her more and more often now, and pulling harder on the oars. Suddenly she stared straight at me, not smiling, not angry, not hiding anything. Almost like a friend.

"We've got into the current," she said.

"What?"

"There's a current here, a strong one. It'll take us south-west unless we can get out of it. I'm rowing as hard as I can," she said, "but I can't bring us in. I'm going to change direction, try to cut across the current on the diagonal. I can't do it going straight across. The current's too strong."

I didn't really understand. I couldn't feel the muscle of the current pulling against her oars, as she could. But I understood that we were slipping farther and farther from where we should be. We were out in deep water all right.

"It's a bad current," said Zillah. "It'll take us on to the Gurnard Rocks."

She didn't say it as if she wanted to scare me. I don't think she *did* want to scare me any more. She wanted my help.

"She'll take in a lot of water when I turn her. You ready to bail hard?"

I nodded. "Is there another can?"

"Use your trainer."

I tugged off my left trainer. Trainer in one hand, plastic can in the other. I was ready.

"Ready?" said Zillah. "Hold tight. It'll get rough."

It did get rough. As *Wayfarer* battled round to cross the current on the diagonal, the sea hit us again, sideways, drenching, freezing, shovelling heaps of water into the bottom of the boat. I bailed the trainer to the left, the can to the right. Trainer, can. Trainer, can. Trainer, can. I was going to beat that sea. I wasn't going to let it get me. The sea thought it was going to win but it wasn't. Zillah and I were winning. Zillah was grunting with effort like a tennis player on TV, and *Wayfarer* was struggling forward, crossing the current. I could feel it now, the fight between Zillah and the current which wanted to sweep us down the coast and on to the rocks. Trainer to the left, can to the right. Trainer, can. Trainer, can. I hurled the water back into the face of the sea. *Don't think you're going to win, because you're not.* Trainer, can, trainer, can, trainer...

"It's OK," said Zillah. "You can stop now."

I looked down at my feet. There was hardly any water in the boat. I looked up. The cliffs were closer. Zillah was leaning back, resting on her oars. She was shaking with the effort.

"We're out of the current," Zillah said. "I'm going to bring her in a bit more, and then we can start making our way up the coast."

I patted *Wayfarer's* side. She'd done her best for us. She hadn't let the sea turn her over, or swamp her. She'd fought her way out of the current. She hadn't let the sea get us.

"She's a good old boat," said Zillah, and she dug the oars into the water again, and began to row us home.

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For further information see www.mcga.gov.uk

Photograph of lifeboat crew provided by John Periam (RNLI)

For further information see www.rnli.org.uk

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