

INDEPENDENT LIFEBOAT FOR THE BROADS (HIRS - HEMSBY INSHORE RESCUE SERVICE)



How many readers of this publication have heard of the *Lifeboat for The Broads*? Most of us have seen the TV Series *Saving Lives at Sea* featuring the exploits of the RNLI's lifeboat

stations around the coasts of the UK and Ireland, but how many of you know that there are another 100 or so lifeboat stations in the UK that don't come under the umbrella and support of the RNLI?

There are in fact four of these independent lifeboat stations on the Norfolk coast alone, including those at Mundesley, Sea Palling, Caister and most significantly at Hemsby where the Hemsby Inshore Rescue Service (HIRS) operates two lifeboats including the specially designed *Lifeboat for The Broads*.

The story of the *Lifeboat for The Broads* began in 1999 following a call from Great Yarmouth Coastguard requesting the inshore inflatable lifeboat stationed on the coast at Hemsby to attend an incident several miles inland on Hickling Broad.

The Hemsby crew responded of course even though this meant having to tow the lifeboat, courtesy of a local farmer, several miles by road to a launching slip at Hickling Broad.

Although that was the first recorded incident of Hemsby Lifeboat being tasked by the Coastguard to attend an incident on the Broads, the history of Hemsby Lifeboat station itself actually began many years previously in the early 1970s following more than a dozen fatalities as a result of drowning along the coastal waters between Winterton and Scratby where the nearest lifeboats were an RNLI "D" class 5m inflatable at Happisburgh to the north, and an old Liverpool Class all weather lifeboat capable of no more than about 8 knots based at Caister to the south. The result of these drownings was a commitment in 1975 by the local Hemsby community to form a local Rescue

Service and to source an appropriate "rescue boat" in the shape of a 4.5m Avon inflatable on loan from the Sub Aqua club. Later that year, thanks to the generosity of the Norfolk Broads Lions Club, the Hemsby Inshore Rescue Service (HIRS) was able to purchase its own boat, a 5m Avon Searider RIB with a 40BHP Mercury outboard, appropriately named *Sealion 1* in recognition of the Lions Club's support.

Following the purchase of their own rescue boat, a house to keep it in and launch it from, volunteers to act as crew had to be recruited and trained, and the boat properly equipped with lifejackets, VHF radio etc. But despite all this, in total during that first year, 30 volunteer crew members were trained and responded to six incidents, which these days we usually refer to as *shouts*.

The next years (1977-1978) were busy with all the administrative measures required to obtain recognition by the Charity Commission and HM Coastguard plus operational matters such as the purchase of a Land Rover for launching the boat and pagers for the crew. During that same two-year period the HIRS responded to no less than 19 *shouts*. The 1980s saw many developments, amongst the most significant being the official recognition by HM Coastguard of Hemsby IRS as a *Declared Facility* and an integral part of the UK Search & Rescue organisation (UKSAR).

During this time Hemsby Inshore Rescue Services responded to more than eighty *shouts*, culminating in 1999 with the incident described previously several miles inland on Hickling Broad. This incident led to a decision to purchase a dedicated "freshwater lifeboat" mainly for incidents on the Broads, where the usual RIB with its relatively deep hull, designed for use at sea, is really not best suited to the often quite shallow waters of the Broads.

The turn of the century saw the introduction of the first Hemsby Broads Rescue Boat, subsequently superseded by similar types of boat, culminating a few years ago with a 14 foot Seastrike/Goodchild Marine very shallow draft

aluminium "dory" powered by a 30hp outboard normally towed to one of some 32 launching sites around the 125 miles of the Broads by a Mitsubishi L200 tow truck. This Broads Rescue Boat, known more commonly as the *Lifeboat for The Broads* and the Hemsby seagoing RIB lifeboat receive around 45 *shouts* per year between them.

The seagoing RIB lifeboat's *shouts* are made more difficult in terms of launching by the serious and on-going coastal erosion.



Photo – Clive Edwards



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LIFEBOAT**

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– and on the Norfolk Broads –

IT COSTS US £350 TO SAVE EACH LIFE

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Hemsby Inshore Rescue Service

Sort Code: **55-81-45** Account Number: **04943694**

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Contact: secretary@hemsbylifeboat.co.uk