

CMC–SAR in Burke County “God’s Country” When the Terrain Is the Test

Burke County doesn’t allow a casual training day. It demands one. In a recent full-scale SAR exercise in “God’s Country,” CMC–SAR members—integrated into Haywood County SAR—joined a multi-agency response scenario where the terrain itself was a primary training objective.

This wasn’t a stroll on established trail. It was relentless up-and-down ridge work, steep side hilling, and repeated climbs that punished pacing, nutrition and hydration mistakes fast. Teams moved from ridge to drainage and back again, navigating tight contours, rock ledges, cliffs and uneven footing while maintaining discipline: grid searching spacing, accountability, and clean radio traffic even when lungs were burning and legs were cooked.

And then there was the vegetation. Portions of the exercise required true bushwhacking—forcing lines through dense understory, pushing through



tangles that swallowed packs and grabbed at helmets. In places, progress wasn’t measured in miles per hour; it was measured in yards, with teams occasionally dropping to hands-and-knees and even crawling to get through the thickest sections. That kind of terrain turns “simple” tasks—holding a bearing, maintaining visual contact, keeping a team together—into real operational skills.

The scenario also moved beyond “find and hike out.” Ground teams practiced systematic search and field reporting under hard conditions, then shifted into patient packaging and movement where

every step matters. A key evolution focused on recovering a mobile subject and moving a patient using a wheeled rescue cart—an approach that can significantly reduce rescuer fatigue and improve patient comfort, but only if the team can coordinate, communicate, and manage obstacles in rugged, off-trail terrain.

Water added another layer. Teams assessed and executed a creek crossing with deliberate risk management—stable footing, spacing, and clear calls—because in real missions, avoidable slips can become additional patients.

Training like this is where interoperability becomes real. CMC–SAR volunteers were proud to be led by one Haywood County SAR very experienced volunteer, and operate shoulder-to-shoulder with them, reinforcing the fundamentals that keep teams effective when conditions are rough: steady pace, disciplined comms, shared standards, and trust built through hard work in hard places.



Thank you to Burke County and all participating agencies, including Canine Search & Rescue Teams for hosting a realistic, demanding exercise—and to Haywood County SAR for continuing to develop integrated teams ready to contribute when the call comes.