

## Report on Southern Regional SAREX held Roxburgh March 27/28 2015

**Objectives:** a) To implement & practice using the new Land SAR Safety Management Systems

b) To apply & follow the Land SAR Initial Response Guidelines

c) To trial the SAR Track software programme

**Personnel:** Volunteer personnel from: North Otago, Dunedin, Milton Balclutha, Catlins, Gore, Invercargill, Central Otago (Roxburgh, Alexandra Cromwell) and Te Anau. Representation also from AREC, Coastguard (Dunedin & Clyde), Search dogs, NZ Land SAR, "SAR Track" & a drone mission crew. Police personnel from: Dunedin, Catlins & Te Anau. Included were Inspector Steve McGregor (Operations Manager for the Southern District) and Inspector Olaf Jensen (Central Otago District Commander)  
Total = 100 personnel

**Overview:** The planning catalyst for the exercise was the development of the new cycle trail alongside Lake Roxburgh which has the potential to bring new search & rescue issues into the Central Otago area. Having a large inland water mass surrounded by difficult terrain was also an opportunity to plan for land & marine resources to be working together.

The spontaneous offer by a group of international technicians with a drone they wished to trial in a SAR context provided the opportunity for exposure to new technology.

The resultant exercise consisted initially of two exercise scenarios in two geographic locations. One scenario focused on Lake Roxburgh & the immediate surrounds with the second scenario based on the Old Man Range (a good proportion of this covering terrain at up to 1700metres). As the exercise progressed a third scenario in the Lake area was also introduced.

### **Safety Management Systems:**

An overview of SMS for the benefit of personnel who had not yet been introduced to them was delivered by Land SAR support officer Mike Ambrose at the Friday evening Incident Management Planning session. This was well received and readily incorporated into the planning for the two scenarios. Each Incident Management Planning Team appointed a Safety Officer for their respective scenarios - a position which was held separate to the main management positions (ie Operations, Planning/Intel & Logistics).

Safety plans were developed for all scenarios and implemented only once signed off by nominated exercise organisers. Land SAR Field Safety Assessment and Take Five Forms for all teams were available and used effectively. Mike Ambrose was readily available to assist with forms or queries from personnel using SMS for the first time.

During the rescue phase of the Old Man Range scenario both a Rescue Controller and Scene Safety Officer were appointed. A safe working area was implemented and personnel on site worked effectively.

Overall safety of the exercise was taken by Senior Sgt Brian Benn. This was clearly relayed to all personnel at the Friday evening planning session and again at the overview briefing session for all personnel Saturday morning.

### **Land SAR Initial Response Guidelines:**

In the planning stage on the Friday evening both Incident Management Teams readily followed & applied the Response Guidelines – roles/positions were identified and tasks delegated. Where personnel were new to management roles support from more experienced members was readily forthcoming.

Planning and documentation was done on paper during this phase. I feel there would have been significant advantage in using the logging aspect of SAR track at this stage in documenting the search effort.

With the majority of personnel present unfamiliar with the SAR Track software programme its application in the early stages of the SAREX proper (Saturday) did cause inevitable delays in populating team taskings and therefore delays in team deployment into the field. The resultant frustration for the management teams was however channelled into development of further plans to ensure team deployment should the IT issues not be resolved.

Given the detail of the team taskings developed during the previous evening's planning sessions I have every confidence had the IT delays not occurred the tasks would have been populated and teams deployed in a timely manner in accordance with the Initial Response Guidelines.

### **The SAR Track software programme**

As expressed above most personnel present were unfamiliar with the programme and the limited number of management support personnel present to facilitate it was also an issue. However after the initial delays the programme proved to be very user friendly and was well utilised. The mapping and live tracking features proving particularly useful and in terms of monitoring teams from a safety perspective very appropriate.

Given the support provided by the programmes developer and his readiness to implement changes recommended I feel utilisation of the programme throughout the region would be a significant advantage.

### **New Initiatives:**

Utilisation of Mountain Bike Search Teams – during both the Lake Roxburgh and Old Man Range Scenarios bike teams were utilised. As a rapid response resource these proved surprisingly efficient in terms of time saving and effectiveness. Stopping to sign cut and monitoring track/traps were readily facilitated and the absence of vehicle noise meant hearing was not so compromised.

Limitations - this resource is very weather dependent both from a terrain and personal gear perspective. A cyclist is very limited in the amount of gear he/she can carry before it becomes "uneconomic". The limited gear factor means the resource is not suited to long periods of immobility and also has limited ability to attend to "the missing party" if found. Also cycle specific footwear was found unsuitable for clambering on rocks or boarded surfaces.

Utilisation of a Drone Team - a report by other personnel on this resource I understand is being formulated. While the resource had limited use during the exercise the technology and potential for application in the SAR context is significant. Used in association with personnel with air observer skills I feel would be essential however.

## General Comments:

- The venue chosen for the "SAR base" was excellent for size and welcoming for personnel however given the challenging nature of the scenarios combined with the objective to trial the SAR track programme some effort by the organisers to arrange fit for purpose planning rooms for the IMTs I feel would have been an advantage. There were mobile operational units which perhaps could have been better prioritised for use.
- Having more management support personnel who were familiar with the SAR Track programme to facilitate its application in the planning stages versus "back loading" from paper documentation would have eased some frustrations and provided a more accurate record of the search effort
- Ensuring IMT identification vests for all IMT personnel were either provided or requested for personnel to bring would have made role identification & evaluation easier. While both IMT teams had the management roles with personnel noted on whiteboards for the Lake Roxburgh Management Team there was no identification in terms of vests worn. For an evaluator from outside of the Region this would have proven problematic particularly with the regular changes of IMT personnel which were a feature of this exercise.
- The use of multiple electronic devices in relatively confined areas did have some impact on radio communication. Going forward this will need to be factored in to any communication plan & disseminated to all personnel.
- Volunteer and police personnel from Queenstown & Wanaka were notable by their absence. Given the significant operational experience by personnel from these areas it was disappointing that there was no representation present at this exercise. From my experience SAREX 's provide the opportunity to not only learn directly from the challenges of the exercise but also from the experience of others participating.
- The opportunity for land and marine resources to work together provided learning opportunities for both.
- The presence by Inspector Steve McGregor (Operations Manager Southern Police District) and his ability to relate to a broad range of SAR volunteers was well received

In summary this was an ambitious challenging SAREX which met its objectives and provided learning opportunities for all participants. Having the added objective of trialling a "new" software programme provided challenges for the more experienced IMT personnel who despite some initial frustration rapidly adapted and utilised the software with good affect.

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