

Exercise Evaluation Report

Canterbury District SAREX 2024

Location: Gawler Downs Station, Surrey Hills, Canterbury.

Date: 15,16,17 March 2024

Report version: Final

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1. Executive Summary

The Canterbury Annual SAREX was held on 15th, 16th, 17th March 2024 on the Gawler Downs Station, Surrey Hills, Mid Canterbury planned by key members of the Canterbury Police SAR Squad in partnership with Rakaia Land Search and Rescue.

The exercise objectives of providing search team leaders and field team members the opportunity to revise skills over a range of search related topics with associated assessment of competencies in a friendly, fun, and competitive environment were largely achieved. All the field exercises were set generally in realistic terrain for constructive participation.

Six Land Search and Rescue Groups from across Canterbury participated, several groups providing multiple teams along with Police SAR Squad members, New Zealand Defence Force and Amateur Emergency Radio Communication members having the opportunity to work together and build stronger connections.

Feedback was generally appreciative and positive about the range of focussed skill stations provided. And participants coped with the weather changes from a very cold Friday night to a heavy frosty Saturday morning followed by a fine warm day changing overnight to a wet Sunday morning.

Overall, the exercise was comprehensively planned and conducted in a way to ensure all participants had time to achieve completion of the full stable of Rogaine station tasks.

1. Recommendations

1. Review technical subject content to plan appropriate time for teaching in future training events. Technology subjects involving GPS, IN Reach, Repeater Setup, Wander search, Thermal Optic, and similar take substantially more time to brief, instruct and provide opportunity to have hands on practice.
2. Review time frames for future Rogaine event stations, feedback from several station facilitators and team participants spoke about being short of time with only one hour, having to reset along with not achieving full learning of that skill topic.
3. Logistics both at commencement and conclusion took much longer than anticipated. Think about how to resource this for future events.
4. Establish a small Incident Management Team for future events. This is a missed development opportunity for upcoming members who could be mentored. An IMT would have maintained accurate tracking of field teams progress and supported the planning and implementation of the logistics operations.
5. Resource a mobile command vehicle/caravan for events where facilities are very basic and rustic. This ensures a good environment for the operation management irrespective of the environment and weather conditions.

2. Introduction

The Canterbury Police District SAREX 2024 is the annual training event for the calendar year and includes partner agencies in a relevant environment to provide a two-day combined learning and training event encompassing Search and Rescue skills.

The Acting District SAR Coordinator has the responsibility for the coordination and training of the Canterbury District SAR squads and liaison with partner agencies in creating training opportunities to maintain capability.

The SAREX was developed using the Rogaine model with skill activity stations positioned across a large area of Gawler Downs Station where teams were assessed and awarded points. Navigation skills and situational tactics were required by participating teams to negotiate the terrain. Participants were made up of Land Search and Rescue volunteers, Police and New Zealand Defence Personnel.

The operation was run over three days with personnel assembling on Friday evening at the exercise Assembly Point. Teams were briefed on Saturday morning and given the initial Rogaine tasking and provided 4wheel drive support to deploy to the remote skill stations.

Field members were required to spend two days in the field camping overnight out on Gawler Downs Station with a compulsory overnight 8-hour rest requirement along with an assessment of campsite and equipment.

Communications for the exercise was managed by the Amateur Emergency Radio Communications team (AREC) with exercise field management control being managed by the exercise organisers.

The exercise concluded mid-day on Sunday with all teams returning to the Exercise Assembly Point for a barbeque and acknowledgement of the participating teams.

3. Background

3.1. Background to the Exercise

The Canterbury Police District Search and Rescue region covers a large landscape from Lewis Pass in the north to the Waitaki River in the south with search and rescue groups spread across this large region. Recognising the geographical spread the district Land SAREX had been established as the annual training forum to bring together the contributing Land Search and Rescue groups, Police Search and Rescue teams, Amateur Radio Emergency Communications and New Zealand Defence Force.

Participants had the opportunity to build relationships with neighbours and partner agencies which are invaluable when they work together on large search and rescue operations.

The Rogaine exercise with a spread of skill stations had the objective of providing revision of skills and an opportunity to learn new skills relevant to the range of search and rescue callouts in the Canterbury region.

Overall, the exercise was to provide an opportunity to practice in a realistic field environment sound search and rescue techniques, provide leadership opportunities and application of skills often learnt on a course now in a field situation.

3.2. Dates: 15-16-17th March 2024

Location: Gawler Downs Station, Lower Downs Road, Surrey Hill, Central Canterbury.

Organising agency(s): Police, Land Search and Rescue

Key people: Sgt Mike Jackson; S/Sgt Antony Callon; A/Sgt Johnny Beveridge; Snr/Const Dennis Arthur; Paul McFall, Fred Clarkson, Murray Bowden, Ali Scarlet, Tania Seward.

3.3. Participating organisations

Police Search & Rescue Squads – Christchurch and South Canterbury
Amateur Radio Emergency Communications (AREC) – Christchurch, Timaru and Dunedin
New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) – Christchurch and Dunedin
Land Search and Rescue Group Support Officer
New Zealand SAR
Canterbury Land Search and Rescue Groups; Oxford, Ellesmere, Rakaia, Methven, Christchurch, South Canterbury.

3.4. Exercise aim.

To provide a two-day combined learning and training SAREX to exercise and upskill field search and rescue members and assess their abilities against the competencies.

3.5. Exercise objectives.

To give team leaders and field team members the opportunity to revise skills in; search techniques; clue processing; first aid skills; technology; navigation; camp set up; GSMEAC briefings; communications; stretcher and patient management and observations.

To assess Land Search and Rescue competencies in a friendly, fun, and competitive manner.

To give Land Search and Rescue, Police SAR, AREC and NZDF the opportunity to build stronger connections.

3.6. Exercise Scenario

The Gawler Downs Station exercise was planned as a field programme which required considerable logistics and skill site preparation by the organising staff prior to the participants assembling on Friday evening for registration.

Briefings for all personnel on Saturday morning with the objective of full deployment by mid-morning to designated start locations. Teams were tasked to rotate through a range of search scenario skill stations over 24 hours designed as either learning stations or assessment stations to practice search skills and techniques. Transition between stations had a navigation component associated along with maintaining communications. Teams were required to overnight camp at a suitable location of choice.

Competencies were assessed at pure skills practise stations by facilitation staff with points accumulated for each team.

4. Evaluation Methodology

4.1. The agreed outcomes of the evaluation activity

A written report outlining the observations of the multi-agency SAREX training in relation to the objectives. This will include any recommendations relating to the objectives.

4.2. Evaluation scope

To observe the SAREX establishment and personnel briefing processes. Field observations of the training stations and working relationships between contributing agency personnel.

4.3. Aspects of the exercise observed, what was not observed.

Observed

Exercise commencement briefings and hot debriefings on Saturday and Sunday.

Competency skill teaching and evaluation stations.

Exercise management team leading the event.

Not Observed

AREC Communications processes.

Campsites

Quiz Exercise and Navigation mobile activity.

4.4. The process followed in preparing and submitting the report.

Contact was made by Kirsty Holland well in advance of the exercise taking place around availability. Phone and email discussions and planning documents were shared. A draft copy will be shared for feedback prior to the final copy being forwarded to NZSAR for their recording purposes.

4.5. Other information

N/A

5. Findings

Exercise Planning

The exercise invitation was circulated to all Land Search and Rescue Groups in the Canterbury Police Region and to supporting agencies. This provided information about the SAREX, dates and location, teams, equipment, programme outline and general logistics. Due to the Canterbury regional drought and extreme fire danger specific instruction on use of gas cylinder cookers only on cleared ground.

Exercise Conduct

Friday evening the majority of SAREX participants arrived at the exercise assembly location and registered. A barbecue evening meal was provided with a number of participants having travelled considerable distance to attend.

Saturday morning, late registrations were completed, exercise packs containing maps and detailed information and safety plan were distributed to team leaders and a series of exercise briefings conducted.

The first with the base facilitators, encompassing safety, emergencies, timings of teams and confirmation of assessment process with emphasis on team participation and having enjoyment.

Second briefing with the assembled exercise teams using the GSMEAC format covering the Gawler Downs station landscape, travel, stock, the exercise objectives, the seven skill station's locations, initial starting deployments, timings, compulsory standdown time frame, overnight camping brief and Sunday conclusion.

The safety briefing about hazards on the station, stock, hotwires, emergency instructions, and in an accident situation "No Duff" transmission when requesting assistance. AREC briefing on communications, channel confirmation and overnight communications.

Teams were deployed progressively by police staff in 4WD Utes initially to the distant skill stations. This consumed more time than the planners anticipated, which resulted in the exercise commencing slightly later than scheduled.

During Saturday site visits were achieved to respective skill stations spread across the rolling Surrey Hill's with 4WD road access via the Gawler Downs station internal road system. A variety of teams were observed being briefed by skill station facilitators, several team GSMEAC briefings to team members by team leaders, teams participating in the specific skill station activity and engagement with the base organisers.

Teams continued operations through to 20:00 on Saturday when the compulsory overnight standdown field camp establishment timeframe commenced.

Sunday, the overnight weather change to steady rain and low cloud challenged all participants commencing field operations and it was a much slower start to the day. It became apparent that a log jam of waiting teams for some skill stations had developed. The organisers choose to extend the exercise timeframe to achieve completion by all teams. Certainly, the wet weather for the first half of Sunday provided a good test of field members clothing and equipment.

Exercise conclusion and the logistics of extraction from the field took time with all participants being provided with hot food on return to the assembly area.

A team building exercise was organised while the exercise organisers compiled the results for field teams, a succinct exercise debrief was held where the results of the competition were announced, and everyone were thanked for their contribution and active participation by the organisers.

6. Conclusions

The Gawler Downs Station SAREX was well planned with considerable effort put into the team information packs which contained the safety plan, map of the exercise area, information about all the skill stations and exercise timings.

Due to illness and other events several of the police organising staff had to change roles at short notice, the staff involved stepped up and delivered the respective briefings appropriately.

Both the exercise briefing, and safety briefing were comprehensive with field teams from contributing groups being provided time to assimilate what they were tasked to undertake. Field deployment logistics soaked up considerable time which impacted the timings with both skill site organisers and teams initially. It was creditable that everyone coped and figured out solutions on the fly.

The two exercise days of training and skills practice were completed fully with some time adjustment by the organisers. Saturday evening the organisers spent some time compiling team progress to understand the full field situation which illustrated the need to extend the exercise time frame on Sunday. The weather contrast between a fine Saturday to a wet Sunday morning especially challenged everyone in the field.

Organisers would have benefited from having a small incident management team working alongside the AREC team and would have maintained a better situational awareness of team's locations and overall exercise progress.

All the participants appreciated overall the range of training and practise opportunities available and enjoyed the approach taken by all skill station facilitators on teaching and confirming search related skills and techniques in a friendly manner. Sample observations at skill stations visited showed sound engagement by everyone involved. The facilitators at each skill station consistently provided a structured learning environment or revision opportunity to put into practice search techniques and methods.

Base facilities were basic with the main shelter available being a large station implement shed within which the operation logistics and food preparation was managed from. (*Mobile Command Truck was booked and was having repairs and the second option was on a Police Operation*)

Field logistics, providing porta toilets and drinking water supplies in several key locations seemed to work.

Communications were managed efficiently by the AREC team with some traffic congestion on each hourly transition changes by teams.

Gawler Downs Station landscape proved workable for a Rogaine style exercise, however the camping sites in amongst areas with stock could have proved less than ideal.

The Objectives for the exercise: -

- To give team leaders and field team members the opportunity to revise skills across a range of skill areas – (detailed in the appendix) - ACHIEVED
- To assess Land Search and Rescue competencies – PARTIALLY ACHIEVED
- To give Land Search & Rescue/ Police SAR / AREC and NZDF the opportunity to build stronger connections - ACHIEVED

7. Appendix

(A)

Key Performance Indicators

KPI	Achieved?	Comments
First Aid Training	Achieved	NZDF medical trainer provided an outdoor first aid teaching session refreshing skills. As a teaching station, the trainer could have used more time.
First Aid Scenario	Achieved	NZDF medical trainer facilitated scenario, required patient assessment & management, and planning how to evacuate along with good team leadership. Assessment station, the facilitator observed that team leadership skills varied and is an area that Land SAR needs to develop.
Observations	Achieved	Well-designed skill station with two separate exercises, first with binoculars searching terrain for clues, the second an observation trail with a series of clues. Assessment station.
Search Techniques	Achieved	Landscape scale station, requiring team leadership and application of search methods and techniques to locate a lost subject. Assessment station, feedback that most teams had a good grasp of search techniques.
Technology	Partially Achieved	Topics, GPS, InReach, Repeater Setup, Wander Search and Thermal optic was a lot to cover in one hour. Base facilitators cut back the teaching to the basics, not sufficient time to have sufficient hands-on practice. Teaching Station, feedback from facilitator's, technical topics need separate sessions to achieve both learning and opportunity for participant practise.
Clue Processing	Achieved	Parked vehicle search and clue processing, team observed briefed & planned how to process the site well. Organisers found they did not always have time to relocate the vehicle, with following teams working in more contaminated situation. Assessment station.
Alpine Rescue (ARC)	Achieved	Low angle stretcher rescue system and high angle dual rope rescue system.

Navigation	Achieved	Navigation activity while teams moving on transition between stations and on arrival out an activity station. Mobile activity.
Communications	Achieved	Team radio communications with AREC during change overs between stations. Top teams given an award by AREC. Feedback, some teams would have liked more practise with radios. Mobile activity.
Campsite	Achieved	Team campsite establishment checks carried out by exercise organisers who awarded points.

(B)

Gawler Downs SAREX Photos

	
Exercise registration	AREC Communications Bus
	
Exercise Briefing	Team members understanding tasking



Observation skill station, part one



Technology skill station



Team briefing, clue processing



Clue processing – vehicle



First Aid Scenario patient evaluation



First Aid Scenario patient management



Low angle ropes briefing



High angle double rope demonstration

(C)

Feedback from exercise participants:

What did you find most valuable?	What would you like to see more of (aimed at content-not catering/logistics etc)?	What would you like to see less of (aimed at content-not catering/logistics etc)?	If we can improve any 3 things, what are your suggestions?	What's one thing from previous SAREX's you've attended that you'd like to see re-introduced (excluding helicopters)?
opportunity to practice skills and get live feedback	making the most of learning moments	less competition / evaluation	Allow more time for logistics at the start and end of exercise to move teams; printing out A4 maps of the area would be more useful than a thumbnail at the corner of a printed topo map - our team reverted to using cellphone GPS as a means of entering coordinates fast which took away from the navigation component	using a variety of map sources including aerial photos
Practicing various skills	Processing clue sites/evidence	Nothing, it was all useful	Communication around changes, team leader training being included, dont use the police car speaker for announcements	Multi team collaboration
Meeting everyone; teaching portions	One add. Team building exercise	Less Navigation points	Shorter Saturday, petrol money	Sat dinner for all;
Being exposed to all facets of a potential search in one exercise	Navigation and map reading	Nothing	Reduce the amount of stations for one day, better Comms re	Maybe one night time exercise.

			timings,	
The variety of tasks to complete over the two days.	Tracking	Nothing	Improve timing to prevent teams ending up at the same stand at the same time.	<i>SAR EX incooperating a coastline/lake/river</i>
The way learning and assessment was combined this year was fabulous.	This was a great mix... no particular notes here.	As above... This was a great mix... no particular notes here.	The layout was a little convoluted. I don't mind doing nav for between stations, but it sometimes made us a little late or other teams late - might be better to separate those challenges so they didn't impact so much on the timings of the task stations. But I never expect these things to be perfect so all in all, it was fine. We got through all our stations ok. I was pleased we got through both med stations on the one day.	As above... This was a great mix... no particular notes here. I think it was the best SAREX I've attended. A bit lucky with the weather, great being there the night before, and the stations were all really well focussed and useful. The people organising each station were focussed on upskilling more than "catching us out" and that makes for a great environment and the best outcomes. Super useful all round
Breath of activities	NA	NA	Food availability for participants	NA
Feedback recieved after having a go ourselves. Created a really good learning environment	More of the same, seemed like a good mix of topics	Not sure	1. It seemed there was some confusion with the initial tasking. Our team arrived to the first aid station with a team right in front of us that walked and was supposed to be	At a previous SAREX there were Sit-Reps req. Every 30min. There was less comms per team at this SAREX. Perhaps more opportunities to practice radio comms next time

			<p>dropped off. This meant we had to wait for our turn which offset our day meaning we completed our final station late and had a reduced version. Not sure where this went wrong but was frustrating for our team and put us on the back foot from the get go. 2. Allowing enough time for each station so we don't miss out on content . 3. More visible signing in area, perhaps just some signage. I wasn't aware we needed to do this until a participant mentioned.</p>	
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From Stand Assessors:

What did you find most valuable?	What would you like to see more of (aimed at content-not catering/logistics etc)?	What would you like to see less of (aimed at content- not catering/logistics etc)?	If we can improve any 3 things, what are your suggestions?	What was some feedback you received at the time from participants?
<p>The chance to combine teaching and assessment within the same event - having some stations focused on skill building, and some on assessing current skills. This makes sure the event is very constructive overall and actually builds people's effectiveness as well as running a competition.</p>	<p>More subject matter experts - Army medics, Alpine Rescue, etc. They help provide interest for members and foster multi-agency connections.</p>	<p>Possibly having fewer topics/stations and allowing a more in-depth focus at each one. An hour is just enough to cover the essentials of a topic and run through exercises on, and it wasn't really possible to teach anyone extra tips and tricks if they already knew the basics - there simply wasn't time.</p>	<p>1: Make sure each station has a reasonable amount to cover in the given time. The tech stand was difficult to run effectively in 1 hour sessions when there were 5 different topics to go over (GPS, InReach, Repeater Setup, WanderSearch and Thermal optic), and when combined with a briefing at the start, this was simply too much to do in the given time, so we had to skip the briefing and thermal optic and just get moving with the other 4 topics straight away, to allow sufficient time to explain each one and then have the teams do a quick exercise. Ideally, a 1 hour stand on tech should just have 2 or 3 topics, so that each thing can be thoroughly explained and taught, with time for a decent practice session. 2: Make sure the people running each stand have a briefing of their own before the event starts. At tech, we were figuring out our own setup and making sure we were confident with everything when the first team arrived, and we had to begin with practically no preparation. We needed to establish waypoints for the GPS session, a suitable place for the repeater, make sure batteries in devices were fresh, figure out a place to hide the wandtrak pendant for teams to find, and make sure we were ready to explain each topic, and we had to do this with only a few minutes before beginning. We made it work, but it was a bit frantic for a while. 3: Try to lay out the event so that teams remain spaced evenly. Even though each team was supposed to be at each stand at a specific time, for the first half of Saturday the tech stand just</p>	<p>Some stations didn't take as long as others to get to, contributing to some of the bunching up of teams we experienced. Aside from that, we didn't hear any general complaints, and it seemed to serve people well overall.</p>

			had back-to-back teams bunched up, meaning we didn't get a chance to have a break or organize ourselves. At some points we were having to split up, and one of us would finish the last topic with the previous team while the other would start the first topic with the arriving team. Some people mentioned that it didn't take very long to walk from the previous location to ours, which may have contributed to the bunching up of so many teams.	
Interaction with other Sar people	I was involved with running OBS station site was great and the two activities and location was ideal.were	No issues	A better turnout from Sar volys, there is so much missed opportunity in learning. Being able to sign off on compentcies ,more time allocation for technical stations.	Thoroughly enjoyed the OBS station
Inta-group working/networking	more activities which involve Police and the vollies interacting	cold weather	hold it a month earlier, in the warm! Nice location, but something more local with more amenities is always nice for exercises.	They enjoyed interacting with other groups
Mix of assessing teams	Link to training material - i.e. at Obs, for those who missed some items, what could they do to improve this skill? How we can show what good looks like.	NA, however need to consider weather and how this may impact some teams	Ensure sufficient time to run through the course and advise what teams had missed, and how they could learn from this for the future.	Teams enjoyed the challenge