



*Link is a quarterly publication of
New Zealand Search and Rescue*

Connecting the search and rescue sector

National recognition for outstanding achievements in SAR



A group of humble but courageous kiwis from across the country converged at Parliament on the evening of 1 May 2019 for the annual New Zealand Search and Rescue Awards.

On presenting the awards, the Hon Phil Twyford, Minister of Transport acknowledged the recipients' dedication to helping others and their significant contributions to search and rescue.

“Behind every nominee there is a story of courage, a focus on safety and the conscious decision to place the wellbeing of others above your own.”

“There is also an outstanding display of teamwork. From operating the radio and coordinating the response, to piloting and crewing the rescue vessel, every member has a vital role to play.”

He also paid tribute to the important work of the wider search and rescue community.

“Search and rescue people, volunteers and paid alike, do a terrific job in what can be very trying circumstances. The work you do can be measured in the most important currencies – as lives saved, injuries prevented, and families reunited.”

“In the year to June 2018, 181 people survived ordeals because of your efforts. Another 723 people were rescued, and 953 assisted. Words cannot express the gratitude felt for you by these people and their loved ones.”

The consistent theme of acceptance speeches was the co-operation of multiple search and rescue agencies leading to a successful outcome. Gold Award winner Blake McDavitt from the Ruapehu Alpine Rescue Organisation was also quick to thank his family, who he said were usually sitting at the dinner table when the call to action would arrive.

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Gold Award – operational activity

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Steven Lett, head of the Cospas-Sarsat (Search and Rescue Satellite Aided Tracking) Secretariat, who received a Special Award this year, sent the following message from Canada, which summed up the work of our sector beautifully.

"This award is especially welcomed coming from New Zealand – the country with the largest number of rescues per capita that are assisted by Cospas-Sarsat. This is what Cospas-Sarsat is all about – countries helping other countries at the same time that they are helping their own citizens. From that standpoint, it is important to acknowledge the extent to which New Zealand gives back. Many of the Cospas-Sarsat assisted rescues are by New Zealanders saving foreign, recreational visitors or vessels in some of the most remote quarters in the world. This is humanitarianism at its best."

Congratulations to all of our Award recipients for 2018. Remember, nominations are always open – forms and guidelines are available on our website: www.nzsar.govt.nz/NZSAR-Awards



Whanganui Surf Life Saving Club

For the rescue of two stranded swimmers from Kai Iwi Beach, Whanganui on 18 February 2018

It was midday on 18 February when two swimmers – a father and his teenage daughter – were reported missing from Kai Iwi Beach. It was feared they had been swept out to sea. Within minutes, the first surf life saving crew (Laura O'Keeffe and Alex Forlong) were on the water in an Inflatable Rescue Boat (IRB). On land, lifeguards Kaya Dobbie and Matthew Newell set up a command centre in a nearby watch tower.

The swimmers were located quickly – on a very slippery ledge, 3 metres up Mowhanau cliffs, trying to escape punishing waves. Laura manoeuvred the IRB close enough for Alex to attempt to swim to the pair. But the storm surf forced her against the rocks and she injured her hand. Laura took Alex back to shore and picked up lifeguards Clarissa Nowak and Sophie Couper.

Once Laura had carefully positioned the IRB, Clarissa swam between huge swells and clambered up to reach the pair. She administered first aid on the girl, who she suspected had a fractured ankle. Clarissa was joined by senior lifeguard Phil Gilmore. Between them, they manoeuvred the girl down the cliffs, and safely transferred her to the IRB. Clarissa and Phil used the second IRB to rescue the father, who was unharmed.

The lifeguards involved in this two-hour operation demonstrated courage and skill for this rescue.

Gold Award – support activity

Blake McDavitt, Ruapehu Alpine Rescue Organisation

For his service and commitment to search and rescue

Blake McDavitt has a passion for the outdoors. He has devoted more than 23 years of volunteer work to Search and Rescue (SAR) services in New Zealand and further afield in Antarctica. Having joined Turangi Land Search and Rescue in 1994, Blake has taken on key leadership and advisory roles over the years. He is currently the Training Officer for this group and a well-respected Team Leader and technical SAR specialist for Ruapehu Alpine Cliff Rescue.

Blake's wide range of skills, knowledge and abilities in the SAR arena see him frequently sought out as the "go-to guy" for specialist knowledge. When LandSAR established an advisory group on best practice in the back country, Blake – in the company of experts in swift water rescue, alpine cliff rescue, cave and avalanche rescue – was unanimously voted to be its leader. Under Blake's guidance, the Back Country Technical Rescue Advisory Group (BTRAG) has gone from strength to strength. One notable achievement of the group was writing the Human Longline Guidelines, which were adopted nationally and endorsed by the Civil Aviation Authority.

In 2003 and again in 2006, Blake led the New Zealand Search and Rescue team based in Antarctica. Last year he was seconded back to Antarctica for a 3-month period.

Blake is also highly regarded by Whanganui Police, who say that he is always the first person they call for sound advice on all aspects of SAR, especially alpine cliff rescue.



Certificates of Achievement – operational activity



LandSAR Methven

Otago Rescue Helicopter

South Canterbury Police SAR Squad

*For the rescue of an injured walker from Little Mt Peel/
Huatekerekere, on 3 June 2018*

The Otago Rescue Helicopter was alerted to a situation where a woman had slipped and fractured her lower leg, approximately 1100 metres up the remote walking track.

Low cloud and deteriorating winter conditions made a recovery by air virtually impossible, but pilot Clayton Girven manoeuvred close enough to offload paramedic Craig Didham to begin medical care. Despite the challenging weather, Clayton also managed to deliver three members of a police search and rescue team within 500 metres of the injured tramp.

Craig stabilised the trumper's leg injury and, with the assistance of the police search and rescue team, began the arduous task of stretcher-carrying her down the hill. It was very cold and the risk of hypothermia setting in was high. Meanwhile, Methven LandSAR team members, supported by Timaru LandSAR members, headed up Little Mt Peel on foot to support the 4km stretcher carry down the hill. The 11-hour rescue concluded around midnight.



LandSAR Wanaka

Southern Lakes Helicopters

Aspiring Helicopters

Wanaka Police SAR squad

Aoraki/Mt Cook Alpine Rescue Team

For the rescue of a climber from the Bonar Glacier, Mt Aspiring/Tititea, 31 July – 3 August 2018

On 30 July, a lone climber became lost in deteriorating weather on Bonar Glacier, Mount Aspiring/Tititea.

Sub-zero temperatures, strong wind, low cloud and high avalanche risk prevented the Wanaka Alpine Cliff Rescue (ACR) team from flying into the area to begin the search and retrieval. Over the next three days, multiple helicopter rescues were attempted by Aspiring Helicopters, Southern Lakes Helicopters, Wanaka and Aoraki/Mt Cook ACR teams but each time they were beaten back by the adverse conditions.

Finally, on 2 August, a break in the weather enabled two rescue helicopters to access the glacier, locate the climber and drop off four ACR team members to assist. The climber was dehydrated, exhausted and had slight frostbite. The ACR team provided warm clothing, food and drink and stayed overnight with him in the snow, ice and wind. An opportunity came the next day for a helicopter to make a snatch and grab rescue.

This rescue mission was made possible by the skills, dedication and effective collaboration of all the search and rescue agencies involved, with the support and coordination of RCCNZ and Police.

Coastguard Auckland

For the rescue of an injured yachtsman near Waiheke Island on 3 March 2018

While cleaning up below deck, a yachtie accidentally connected two exposed wires, engulfing himself and the area in flames. Although burnt, he managed to reach his fire extinguisher, put out the fire and make a distress call. Instinctively, he crawled into the shower and sat, huddled in a duvet, under the running water until help arrived.

Two Coastguard rescue vessels battled choppy sea conditions to reach the badly damaged yacht. Coastguard volunteer Chris Griggs found the skipper in intense pain, with significant burns to his lower body. He had lost layers of skin and was suffering from hypothermia. Chris administered pain relief, enabling the man to climb out of his boat and onto the Coastguard vessel for evacuation. The patient's burns were wrapped, which minimised the damage to his body.

Coastguard transferred the skipper to the nearest landing point (Kennedy Point) to meet with an ambulance and the Westpac Rescue Helicopter.





Phoebe Havill, Callum Fulton, Andrew Earl-Peacock, Andrew Hodgson – Whangamata Surf Life Saving Club

For the rescue of three stranded kayakers from Whenuakura Island, Whangamata on 20 November 2018

The owner of a kayak company raised the alarm when three rental kayaks had been out for several hours and not returned. The Whangamata Callout Squad launched their Inflatable Rescue Boats (IRBs) and headed straight out to Whenuakura Island, where water channels through a narrow archway – making it dangerous to enter and exit.

The swell was too big for the IRB's to enter the channel, so Phoebe Havill and Callum Fulton swam in with helmets, tube and fins. They negotiated submerged rocks and fought strong currents to reach the trio: a mother and her two daughters.

A decision was made to use a small side exit of the island, typically less exposed to surging swells. Callum assisted the first of the patients off the rocks and into the waiting IRB. But conditions changed quickly, so Phoebe and Callum decided to extract the remaining two through the main channel. The lifeguards secured the kayakers in rescue tubes and towed them through the surges of water in the archway, out to the waiting IRBs.

The focus upon everyone's safety during the rescue meant a well-timed decision to reflect upon deteriorating conditions and alter the initial plan.

Certificates of Achievement – support activity



Rodney Bracefield
Rescue Co-ordination
Centre New Zealand

For his service to search and rescue in New Zealand

Rodney Bracefield's involvement in search and rescue (SAR) spans 45 years, beginning with the Royal New Zealand Air Force in 1974, where he worked as Air Defence Liaison Officer for the SAR sector. Since then, he has made a huge contribution to the development of information management tools that are critical to the success of SAR operations.

In 1985, Rodney joined the Civil Aviation Authority and later moved on to the National Rescue Co-ordination Centre (NRCC), where he became manager of the team. Rodney played a key part in restructuring the NRCC into the Rescue Co-ordination Centre New Zealand (RCCNZ) and the move to Maritime NZ.

In 1988, Rodney became involved with the Cospas-Sarsat, the international satellite system for SAR in New Zealand. He helped implement the installation of the Low Earth Orbit ground station in 1991 and later, the Geostationary ground station. When Cospas-Sarsat began developing the Medium-altitude Earth Orbiting Satellite System, Rodney worked with the Australian Maritime Safety Authority and a supplier to plan and complete two new ground stations – in New Zealand and Australia.

Rodney has also project managed the new distress beacon database. He is currently handling the transition of all 85,000 beacon registrations to the new system.



Adam Fraser
Surf Life Saving
New Zealand – Taranaki

For his service to Surf Life Saving and search and rescue

Adam Fraser is a man who many consider to be at the forefront of search and rescue in Taranaki. He has been heavily involved in the Taranaki Surf Life Saving Club since qualifying as a lifeguard 25 years ago. He is currently serving his seventh year as SAR Co-ordinator of the Club's emergency after-hours callout squad and also volunteers for the squad as a Duty Officer.

Adam's knowledge and passion for SAR were recognised by his appointment as Mentor, then Instructor at the National Lifeguard School. This is the highest qualification and level of lifeguard training in New Zealand. As well as spending many unlogged hours developing and training the callout squad, Adam also volunteers as a marine swimmer for the Taranaki Rescue Helicopter.

He is an environmental marine SAR subject matter expert and is currently training to become an NZSAR Evaluator. Adam is also chairman of the National Lifesaving Advisory Group, Chief Examiner for the Taranaki Region and volunteer lifeguard at the Fitzroy Surf Life Saving Club.

Adam is described by his colleagues as a person with outstanding energy. He is well respected and highly skilled at managing his team both on and off the water.



Jo Norgrove Coastguard Auckland

*For her service to
Coastguard and search
and rescue*

Joanne Norgrove has volunteered for Coastguard since 2006. She is a Senior Master on all three of Coastguard Auckland's rescue vessels. Last year she clocked up a staggering 600 operational hours on the rescue vessels, in addition to teaching and assessing training modules around the Northern Region.

As a Regional Coastguard Instructor, Jo gives her time freely to train, assess and develop the crew at Coastguard Auckland – and members of the public too. She has also found time to complete further study in Marine Engineering at the Maritime School.

Jo draws on her extensive knowledge of boating as a tutor for the 'Suddenly in Charge' course – a safety course designed for women who wish to have more knowledge and confidence on the family boat if something goes wrong.

Jo is described as a committed Coastguard volunteer with a calm and collected demeanour. She delegates effectively, encourages her crew and gives them the opportunity to practice and develop skills. Jo goes beyond business as usual with her consistent contributions across her own unit and the rest of the region, and her tireless efforts over almost 13 years with Coastguard.



Coastguard New Zealand

*For the Old4New Coastguard
Lifejacket Upgrade campaign*

The **Old4New** Coastguard Lifejacket Upgrade campaign encourages boaters to trade-in their old, damaged or worn lifejackets for a discount on a brand new, fit-for-purpose lifejacket. The Old4New van travels the length of New Zealand, visiting boat ramps and communities to spread the safety message.

In the summer of 2017-18, the campaign saw over 3,500 lifejackets traded in across the country. The Old4New van visited 53 boat ramps and locations nationwide, covering over 9000kms.

The Old4New team encountered many people with lifejackets that were severely waterlogged, damaged, outdated or simply didn't fit anymore. Of the 3,500 lifejackets traded in, over 70% were discarded because they were obsolete or had unacceptable levels of damage. Over 300 lifejackets that fell into the "no longer fit" category were near new and fully compliant, so were sent to in-need communities across Auckland and the Pacific Islands.

The Old4New Lifejacket Upgrade campaign is now into its third year. It has not only ensured that more boaters are given the opportunity to keep themselves safe on the water, but also reassured many Coastguard volunteers that should a call for help come in, there are more boaters with the right equipment to keep them safe.

Special Awards



Cospas-Sarsat Secretariat

For an important contribution to international search and rescue, and for ensuring the provision of the global Cospas-Sarsat distress system

This award was accepted by Nigel Clifford: Deputy Director Safety and Response Systems Maritime NZ, on behalf of the Cospas-Sarsat Secretariat

COSPAS = Cosmicheskaya Systyema Posiska Avariynyich Sudov

SARSAT = Search and Rescue Satellite Aided Tracking

Cospas-Sarsat is a satellite system that provides free alerts, with reliable location data, of people in distress anywhere on the globe. In 2018 alone, beacon alerts received via Cospas-Sarsat saved 74 lives and assisted 118 people in New Zealand.

The system is administered internationally by the Secretariat based in Canada. The work of the Secretariat ensures that the system continues to perform – having a significant impact on saving lives of the lost, missing and injured throughout the New Zealand Search and Rescue Region and worldwide. Their small team liaises with SAR and technical specialists from participating countries, compose reports, test and approve new beacons, update training materials and provide contributions to other international meetings and standard setting organisations.

Over the years the Secretariat has provided New Zealand with invaluable guidance with ground installations, which are essential to receiving satellite signals and reaping the full benefit of the Cospas-Sarsat system.

The devotion of the Cospas-Sarsat Secretariat to the ongoing saving of lives continues to enable a worldwide system of satellites and ground networks to be developed, helping to reduce the response time to distress situations.



Terry Blumhardt, Sarah Cate, Cliff Jones – LandSAR Turangi

For an important contribution to search and rescue in the New Zealand Search and Rescue Region – the rescue of two boys from the Tongariro Alpine Crossing on 19 October 2016.

Two teenage boys dialled 111 when they became separated from their school group on the Tongariro Alpine Crossing. They found themselves on a sheer mountain face in strong winds, extreme cold and poor visibility.

Police contacted the mountain guides to assist, three of whom were on Tongariro, but on different sides. While Terry Blumhardt set out on his own from one direction, Sarah Cate and Cliff Jones climbed up to the south crater from the other. Every 30 metres or so they had to hunch down in the strong wind gusts, as losing their footing could have been fatal.

Terry found the boys on the trail to Tongariro Peak, perched in a very high, precarious position. By digging a trench through the snow and ice, Terry got the boys down safely and used a Z sack to get them out of the wind. Both boys were showing signs of hypothermia. When Sarah and Cliff arrived, they put more clothing on the boys and got them to their feet. By continuously nudging their legs forward, they made slow progress down the mountain. The group kept descending until they reached an area clear enough for helicopter evacuation.



Welcome Alita

Alita Bigwood joined the New Zealand Search and Rescue team in Wellington last month as Training Co-ordinator.

Her role will be co-ordinating New Zealand's two search and rescue skill acquisition training programmes. She is currently working on building up her knowledge of the SAR sector and establishing key working relationships with stakeholders.

Alita has a strong background in medical education. She joins us from the New Zealand College of Public Health Medicine where she was Senior Education Officer for the Public Health Training programme. Prior to this role, she was with the Royal New Zealand College of General Practitioners for seven years. She worked as Senior Advisor for the Division of Rural Hospital Medicine training programme as well as previously co-ordinating the professional development of nearly 4,000 GPs.

"I really enjoyed supporting and monitoring the progress of the doctors and ensuring the quality of education – as well as being an advocate for public safety," says Alita.

Alita has also applied her skills in the hospitality, care-giving and banking industries in New Zealand and the UK. Between jobs, she spent a year in the Cook Islands volunteering on a missionary assignment.

"Because who wouldn't take up the opportunity to live on a tropical island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean?"

Away from work, Alita enjoys photography, travelling, singing in a band and long walks. She and her husband have recently finished a house renovation, doubling the size of their house.

"I loved managing this project and was very involved in the demolition and site preparation as well as the finishing stages," she said.

"I'm looking forward to bringing my enthusiasm and professionalism to New Zealand Search and Rescue."

New funding structure for training in place

The new funding arrangements for search and rescue skills acquisition training came into effect in April this year, replacing the previous Adult Community Education funding. This means Government funding is now provided directly to New Zealand Search and Rescue to purchase the delivery of skill acquisition training courses for people involved in search and rescue (SAR) nationwide.

Contracts are in place with two providers:

- New Zealand Land Search and Rescue – for the delivery of courses aimed primarily at LandSAR members and LandSAR competencies
- Tai Poutini Polytechnic – for the delivery of multi-agency courses.

"Training forms a significant time commitment for all SAR members and is critical to ensuring our people are able to operate safely and effectively together," says National SAR Support Programme Co-ordinator Rhett Emery.

"Access to fees-free training is integral in achieving this."

The suite of courses available in 2019 includes those delivered in the past. They will be delivered regionally around the country to meet training demand.

The 2019 Tai Poutini Polytechnic SAR Training calendar is available here: www.tpp.ac.nz/study-options/search-and-rescue/search-and-rescue/

The calendar for courses delivered by LandSAR is available from the LandSAR website:
www.landsartraining.nz/page/landsar/

Te Araroa – New Zealand's long trail

NZSAR is currently working with the Te Araroa Trust to promote the carriage of distress beacons and the Outdoor Safety Code to users of the Trail.

Chief Executive of the Trust, Mark Weatherall, former head of Surf Life Saving New Zealand knows how important it is for search and rescue prevention messaging to be driven home, especially for longer adventures like this one.

"We want people to maximize their enjoyment of the Trail and ensure they make it home to tell the story," he said.

Te Araroa is New Zealand's national walking trail, traversing 3,000 kilometres of stunning scenery as it winds its way from Cape Reinga in the far north to Bluff at the bottom of the South Island.

Opened in 2011, it has been rated among the top long walks in the world by CNN and National Geographic for its scenic beauty and the way it connects walkers with New Zealand communities, cultures and historic sites.

During the 2018-2019 walking season (October-April), the number of people walking the entire length of the Trail exceeded 1,200 for the first time. Hundreds of thousands more walked individual sections in their weekends, during their holidays, or at the end of the day as part of their weekly exercise regime.

"Walking the Trail provides people with an immense sense of achievement, as well as significant mental and physical health benefits," said Mark. "The growing number of walkers is also making a major contribution to the many communities the Trail passes through by boosting regional economies, re-invigorating towns and enabling local businesses to thrive."

Te Araroa Trust is the kaitiaki (guardian) of the Trail, responsible for developing, promoting and managing the Trail for the good of New Zealand.

For more information please feel free to contact Mark Weatherall – Chief Executive, Te Araroa Trust – 021 132 4519, mark@teararoa.org.nz



"We want people to maximize their enjoyment of the trail and ensure they make it home to tell the story."

– Mark Weatherall

The following post to the Te Araroa 2018-19 Facebook page on 2 December 2018 is reprinted here with the permission of the author, Ian Landreth.

RESCUE: I have just benefitted from my PLB (Personal Locator Beacon) Travelling South Island solo, south bound a few days ago... Rangitata to Tekapo. Swept away in a river. Long ride downstream, knee smacked around so couldn't walk anywhere. Pressed PLB. Oh those rotors were good to hear! Transferred to Christchurch Hospital Emergency Dept. Now discharged and recovering. Injuries will eventually mend mostly bruises, abrasions and sprains BUT ...

Shared Lesson 1:

- If you are solo and don't have a PLB on your body and reachable at all times, you're a bloody idiot and should not be in the NZ wilderness. The South Island especially has many remote sections

Shared Lesson 2:

- If I had been in a group of 4 we would have still needed a PLB in the group. Party could have split and gone for help but likely at least 2 days hike to nearest contact.

Shared Lesson 3:

- I judged the crossing based on depth and velocity, but there is another factor; the frequent late snow falls are adding to a late spring melt PLUS the frequent rainfall which equals unstable river bottoms. A manageable depth can change in a moment as the river beds have not had a rest (consolidated) from the water flows and shingle bottoms and even large rocks you could normally brace against with your feet, are all loose and just wash away. So the factors in a safe crossing change instantly. This will not change in the South Island until a significant period of low water flows.
- I have previously been with Search and Rescue. This is the first time I have called a rescue for myself. The Rescue Team was wonderful and reinforced the message. If you have a PLB make sure you can reach it. If you don't have one make it a purchase at your next stop.

I will find the Trail again, will you?

Deep cave rescue exercise



A caver, who has suffered multiple injuries after a fall, is trapped approximately 300 metres deep in the Ellis Basin cave system on Mount Arthur. A full-scale cave search and rescue is launched, with cave teams tasked to locate the injured man, stabilise and safely transport him in a stretcher to the surface.

This was the scenario used in New Zealand's largest cave search and rescue training exercise (SAREX) to date, which took place from 26 February to 3 March 2019. The event attracted over 100 cavers from New Zealand and Australia as well as Police and LandSAR teams. It was the ninth event of its kind - funded every three years by New Zealand Search and Rescue to test cave rescue capability.

On 26 February, an advance team began pre-rigging the search area in the cave and fixing ropes, to simulate those left by the missing party. This set the scene for a small group of experienced cavers to weave their way down eight pitches underground, where they waited to be rescued.

Sergeant Malcolm York, head of Tasman Police Search and Rescue and Incident Controller for the cave SAREX said the cavers arrived at different times from different regions.

"Reid Helicopters flew everyone up to the area – cave rescuers, surface support personnel and tonnes of gear. This in itself was a logistical challenge, so ensuring we had the right people as air controllers was crucial."

Before the flying in was completed, a 'hasty' team was deployed into the cave to conduct an initial search. The missing party was found around four hours later and a medical team dispatched to assist. What followed was approximately 48 hours of highly skilled team work, taken in shifts, to evacuate the patient and all caving personnel without incident.



The Ellis Basin system is a 30km-long alpine cave system on Mount Arthur, North-west Nelson. It has been explored to a depth of 1,024 metres, making it the second deepest known cave in New Zealand. Unlike Waitomo and Waipu caves in the North Island, Ellis Basin and its marble neighbours are generally explored only by the most experienced cavers – making it the perfect setting for a search and rescue training exercise.



“Once the search team had located the injured caver, they were able to use the radio’s text system to send very precise information about his location, the nature of his injuries and the type of assistance required. These messages were transmitted up to the entrance team within four hours of entering the cave.” – John Patterson

Cave Search and Rescue Adviser John Patterson said the exercise provided all parties with the opportunity to collaboratively test their knowledge, skills and equipment. For example, the latest communication technology – the cave-link radio communication system (which transmits text messages through rock) – was tested at depth, with successful results.

“One radio unit was left at the surface with the entrance team and another was sent to the minus 300m level. The third unit went with the search team to find the missing party.”

“Once the search team had located the injured caver, they were able to use the radio’s text system to send very precise information about his location, the nature of his injuries and the type of assistance required. These messages were transmitted up to the entrance team within four hours of entering the cave.”

By comparison, another communications team used a more traditional Michie phone – which operates via a single telephone wire run through the cave off reels – and this took about 16 hours to reach the accident site.

“From a search and rescue perspective, the sooner you get that information back to the surface, the sooner you can escalate the rescue or stand people down,” said John.

Cave rescue teams were also able to trial new, lightweight hauling techniques using 10mm ropes instead of the 11mm used in previous years.

“These thinner ropes are more technically suited to cave rescue as opposed to cliff or alpine rescue,” said John. “The weight and bulk difference between a 10 and 11mm rope is significant. On a rescue, we install a lot more safety lines in the cave than those used on a recreational cave trip – over 2km of rope was used in this exercise. A 10mm rope is more than adequate strength-wise.”

Counterbalance weight techniques, using smaller teams, proved to be the most efficient way to get the stretcher up the eight pitches to the surface.

“With less people on the end of the rope, you apply less force on the anchors,” said John. “It’s quick and reduces the risk to all concerned. Less time spent on the pitch means less chance of rockfall.”



Malcolm said Police depend very heavily on the technical expertise of cavers to respond to underground incidents.

“There are no other search and rescue conditions that are more challenging,” he said. “When you are negotiating complex cave passages to reach people in complete darkness, it is super important to know we are on a good footing with cave search and rescue specialists.”

“We have about one or two caving incidents each year and we need to be prepared. Building on our experience and working on relationships makes us so much more efficient.”

The patient emerged at about 6pm on Saturday 2 March, approximately 6 hours ahead of the expected schedule. Helicopters arrived the following day to transport the cavers back to civilisation.

“It was a really good result,” said Malcolm. “It couldn’t have gone any better.”

SAR Insight

"Searching needed to be done at a very low level – you could be standing right over someone and not realise they were there." – Sergeant Craig Madden.

The search for John Mohi

A five-day search for a 77 year-old Maketu man in February led to closure for his family and highlighted some important things to consider when people with dementia go missing.

When Police were notified of the missing man on the evening of 11 February, family members and volunteers from the Maketu community had already been searching for him for several hours. John Moses (Mohi) had recently been diagnosed with onset

dementia and took medication for bipolar disorder. He had set out on his daily walk early that afternoon and hadn't returned.

The search operation that ensued was led by the Tauranga Police SAR squad and involved over 90 local volunteers, including LandSAR and Surf Life Saving teams. Sadly, on 16 February Mr Mohi was found deceased.

Search timeline

11.02.19

After the incident control point was initially set up at the Tauranga Police station at 9pm, three likely scenarios were discussed: Mr Mohi had either entered the bush; was lying injured nearby; or near his home address.

Maketu is a small coastal settlement with large rural farms, a small urban township and patches of heavy bush. Although the weather was warm on 11 February, there were rough seas caused by a recent storm. Surf Life Saving conducted a shoreline search.

At this stage Police Dog teams were not used. This was due to the belief that any tracking scent had been contaminated by the large number of community volunteers already on foot in the area.

The local rescue helicopter and the Police Eagle helicopter were both contacted, but unable to assist.

The first search team was deployed at 11.30pm with thermal cameras. They were supported by a second team later that night.

12.02.19

At 4am, both search crews were stood down – to be relieved by more volunteers and a LandSAR team at day break.

The incident control point was shifted to the Maketu Community Hall, with the local community constable as family liaison officer. Mr Mohi's granddaughter was the spokesperson for the family and her support groups engaged and managed many community volunteers. One of the family members used the local Facebook page to confirm sightings of Mr Mohi and other lines of enquiry.

Eagle flew down and searched the area using its thermal camera.

13.02.19

Increasingly hot weather led to more concern for Mr Mohi's safety as the search continued. A Police SAR dog handler was brought in to assist.

14.02.19

A peer review of the operation coincided with a Lost Person Behaviour Analysis and a consultation with a survivability specialist.

A medical profile shed more light on Mr Mohi's likely behaviour while he was without his medication. Leading into day four of the search, he was suspected to have become very confused, distressed and even paranoid, which may have caused him to actively hide. It was also discovered that Mr Mohi had 50% hearing loss in both ears, so he may not have heard calls from the search teams. His physical condition was good – his profile suggested he would set off with a shuffle, but gain momentum and could easily walk 10-15km at a time.

15.02.19

Armed with a fresh perspective, Police SAR groups and LandSAR teams from the wider Bay of Plenty and Waikato joined the community volunteers to complete more



A search team works their way through the long grass and shrubs at the back of Mr Mohi's home.

"It's important to let family know exactly what you are doing. Keep them constantly updated to establish that trust and help facilitate an informed search."

"In this operation, the involvement of whanau secured the support of community members and allowed us largely unrestricted access to residential areas."

– Sergeant Craig Madden

extensive searches in some of the areas already covered.

The incident control point moved to the Fire Station.

16.02.19

At 4.30pm the Police recovery dog located Mr Mohi in dense bush, 820 metres in a direct line from his home.

Reflecting back on this operation, Sergeant Craig Madden, SAR Co-ordinator for Western Bay of Plenty, said family liaison can be mission critical.

"With dementia-related searches, you can't rely on lost person behaviour statistics only. You need to compile an accurate and detailed missing person profile – subjective, statistical, theoretical and medical information all need to be explored. Liaising with family, medical specialists and other members of the community early on makes this possible."

Transparency was also key, he said. "It's important to let family know exactly what you are doing. Keep them constantly updated to establish that trust and help facilitate an informed search."

"In this operation, the involvement of whanau secured the support of community members and allowed us largely unrestricted access to residential areas."

Craig and his colleagues were able to share their personal experiences of searching for missing people with dementia with the search teams.

"We knew, for instance, that people with dementia or mental health issues can be very goal driven – they keep going in one direction until they get to an obstacle. Then they often stop, lie down or get down and crawl through on hands and knees to stay on their desired path."

The peer review on 14 February also looked at how to make the best use of the community volunteers, who were completing tasks very quickly.

"We had lots of people helping out, which was great - but if they don't have the skills or equipment we can't qualify or quantify their search," said Craig. "By mixing up the search teams and putting those community volunteers with a qualified LandSAR member, or a Police SAR member, we stood a much better chance of getting a result."

Another learning for Police that emerged from the search for Mr Mohi was to consult the Area Dog Section Manager at the earliest opportunity.

"Police Dogs are dual trained in both ground scent tracking and air scent searching," said Craig. "So there may have been a dog deployment option at the initial stages within the designated search area."

He said moving the incident control point from the Community Hall was imperative, as it separated the busy activities of the community from the Incident Management Team, allowing for a controlled environment to work in.

The operation also highlighted a need for further public education around when to report someone missing.

"There was a misunderstanding where the family thought they had to wait 48 hours before reporting Mr Mohi missing to Police. We need to report missing persons straight away – particularly for dementia patients. The longer time we take to activate a search response, the bigger the search area becomes."



Duncan's desk

It seems a bit unbelievable to me that we're half way through 2019 already. And while not everyone looks forward to winter, I'm certainly hoping for some good snow and calm days on Mt Ruapehu with its new gondola. If you happen to be joining me in and around the snowline, you'll notice new Avalanche Advisory signage put in place by the Mountain Safety Council with our support. These signs will be standardised around the country making it easier for back-country adventurers to understand avalanche risk wherever they are.

The SARdonyx joint search and rescue operational information system went live on Monday 6 May, replacing the legacy RCCNZ and Police SAR information recording systems. SARdonyx represents a significant change to how we record and share information and how we work together as a sector. Many people from across the SAR sector plus a range of consultants and contractors helped us to develop this system. I am very grateful for all the assistance we received.

The New Zealand Search and Rescue Awards for 2018 were held in Parliament on 1 May (see pages 1-6). It is always humbling to hear of the dedication and commitment of SAR people from across the country (and this year, internationally). While the Awards recognise only a few people each year, it's great to be able to share their stories and offer some well-deserved recognition.

The NZSAR Secretariat has undergone a bit of change recently. Steve Ross, our Assurance Coordinator left us to pursue career opportunities. We hope to have Steve's position filled shortly. Alita Bigwood has joined us as Training Coordinator (see page 6). This is a new position responsible for most aspects of our training responsibilities.

This also seems to be conference season. The fourth SAR workshop of the

Council of Managers of National Antarctic Programmes was held in Wellington and Christchurch recently, with assistance from RCCNZ. Antarctica might seem quite distant from New Zealand but we have some significant SAR responsibilities there. As there are so many different nations operating vessels, aircraft and research programmes in Antarctica, it's very beneficial for these managers to get together occasionally to share information and develop SAR processes in case they are needed.

The Australia-New Zealand SAR Conference on Australia's Gold Coast has been running a few years now. This year we have a high level of Kiwi involvement with Katie Bruce from Volunteering New Zealand presenting on our Volunteer Study, Rhett presenting on our survey of rescued people and prevention messaging and Conrad and Barry covering the challenges of SAR on the Tongariro Alpine Crossing.

The International Maritime Rescue Federation (IMRF) quadrennial World Maritime Congress will be held in Vancouver in June and a small number of New Zealanders will attend. This is an excellent opportunity for us to check in with the international maritime rescue community, share what we have developed and get the best ideas from around the world. Coastguard has led New Zealand's representation at the IMRF for a number of years now which, with all the ideas they have brought back to NZ, has been of great benefit to our overall maritime rescue capability.

We have a lot of work planned for the coming months. Thank you in advance for all the help we will need.

Stay safe,
Duncan

Calendar

Australian & New Zealand Disaster and Emergency Management Conference,
Gold Coast, Australia – 12-13 June 2019
<https://anzdmc.com.au/>

Australian & NZ Search and Rescue Conference: SAR Never Sleeps – Past, Present and Future of Search and Rescue, Gold Coast, Australia – 14 June 2019
<https://sar.anzdmc.com.au>

IMRF conference: 15-17 June
SAREXs and SAR training:
nzsar.govt.nz/Calendar/Events

Websites

www.nzsar.govt.nz

Search and Rescue sector resources and information, including a PDF of this newsletter

www.adventuresmart.nz

Safety information and tips for people planning outdoor activities

www.beacons.org.nz

Information about 406 beacons, including where to purchase, rent and register a distress beacon

IMRF:

www.international-maritime-rescue.org/

Te Araroa Trail:

www.teararoa.org.nz

ANZSAR Conference:

www.sar.anzdmc.com.au/

SARdonyx training on START:
www.nzsar.govt.nz/Knowledge-Training/START/SARdonyx

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