

NZSAR Gold Award

This was awarded for the most significant contribution to search and rescue in the New Zealand Search and Rescue region in 2013.

Marius Bron, Jonathan Hattrell, Richard Bottomley, and Sam Innes, from South Westland Alpine Cliff Rescue For the Explorer Glacier rescue on 7 March 2013

Sabine Hellenbrandt and her climbing partner Helmut Lachmann were flown into Pioneer Hut on 7 March 2013, aiming to climb the Glacier Peak above the Explorer Glacier. What unfolded, though, was a complex rescue when Sabine slipped, fell and landed in a crevasse, breaking her arm and ankle.

Helmut managed to secure her and treat her injuries as best he could, before he trekked 2.5km over steep ice terrain to raise the alarm.

The South Westland (commonly known as the Fox/Franz) Alpine Cliff Rescue (ACR) team was notified and prepared to carry out the rescue. The Fox/Franz ACR team arrived at the scene, landing above Glacier Peak around the 3,000m mark on a razorback ridge. The team had to secure themselves to the ridge and wait for the pilot, Sam, to rotate the helicopter before they could get their equipment from the machine. This manoeuvre required a high level of skill from him – and an excellent relationship with the ground team of Marius, Jonathan, and Richard. After the helicopter left, the cloud thickened and visibility reduced to one metre.

The team had to search the glacier using voice appeal as visibility was so limited. After an hour they heard a response to their calls and were able to locate Sabine. The team secured her, managed her hypothermia, and camped by her during the night – monitoring and protecting her from the cold – until she could be taken out by helicopter when the weather cleared.

This rescue was conducted in extreme conditions: poor visibility, at altitude, and in steep glacial terrain. The team chose to carry out the operation at a calculated personal risk. If they had not done so, Sabine would not likely have survived the night.

NZSAR Certificates of Achievement for Operational Activity

These were awarded for an important contribution to search and rescue in the New Zealand Search and Rescue Region during 2013.

Antarctica New Zealand and the United States Antarctic Program For their response to the Twin Otter air accident in the Queen Alexandra Range on 23 January 2013

on 23 January 2013 a Twin Otter aircraft crashed, with three aircrew on board, in the Queen Alexandra Range. The range is in a remote deep polar field located 675km south of McMurdo Station and Scott Base, Antarctica. The search and rescue operation required a significant number of personnel and resources as events unfolded. The pre-planning and the subsequent search and rescue operation were both conducted through the McMurdo Station Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) in Antarctica coordinating with the Rescue Coordination Centre NZ. This enabled the response team to be supported, well briefed and resourced for a deep polar field rescue operation.

The EOC operates a unified command structure with both the United States Antarctic Program and Antarctica New Zealand support staff being instrumental in delivering sound action planning. Resources utilised for this rescue response included: the Joint Antarctic Search and Rescue Team (JASART), a C-130 Hercules aircraft, a Kenn Borek DC-3 Basler and Twin Otter aircraft, New York Air Guard personnel, as well as NZ and US helicopter support.

JASART members were ferried to the remote 13,000ft high crash site by helicopter, after having established a local staging area on Beardmore Glacier. Once at the scene, JASART members worked tirelessly in the extreme environmental conditions (sub-zero temperatures and high elevations) to assess the terrain and access the crashed aircraft. Unfortunately, due to the challenging environmental circumstances and the site location, the operation was unable to return the remains of the lives lost. Along with other flight crews and support staff, the JASART team spent five days in the very remote, deep field waiting for the weather to clear for their return journey to Scott Base. This operation demonstrated the strong relationship that exists between the United States Antarctic Program and Antarctica New Zealand to support a unified SAR response in Antarctica.

Sunset Beach Surf Life Saving Club

For the rescue of ten rock fishermen on 1 April 2013

On Easter Monday 2013 the Sunset Beach mobile lifeguard patrol observed a group of ten rock fishermen who were stranded by the incoming tide on a rocky outcrop 60 metres from the shoreline. Along with the incoming tide, the surf was building and waves were beginning to crash over the rocks.

Reaching the fishermen from the seaward side was out of the question because of the surf conditions. Lifeguards made their way, about 2 kilometres around the coast, to a small beach close to where the fishermen were stranded. Some of the lifeguards swam the 60 metres out to the rock, and assisted them one by one back to the shore. The fishermen, who were fully clothed, had limited English and were reluctant to enter the water. It took the lifeguards about half an hour to bring all ten men to the small beach. Many of them were in various stages of hypothermia.

With the tide almost fully in, there was only a very small area on the beach. An IRB crew assessed that it would be too risky for the fishermen to get them off the beach through the rocks, and that the cliff face at the rear of the beach area would be too difficult to scale. So the decision was made that a rescue helicopter would be required

to winch the ten fishermen from the shore. The winching operation took 45 minutes to complete. Once all the patients were safe on land, they were assessed at the rescue tower. The helicopter was unable to return to the beach to winch out the lifeguards, so they swam back around the rocks to the main beach.

All the lifeguards involved in this rescue displayed great skill in a dangerous situation, and potentially saved ten people from drowning.

Peter Craig, Katherine Craig, and Matthew Craig, from the Whakatane Surf Life Saving Club

For the rescue of two divers at Otarawairere on 10 August 2013

Two Whakatane men, who had been diving at Otarawairere Bay, became trapped by the rising tide as they made their way home along the coast in mid-winter on 10 August 2013. They called for help on their mobile phone, and the Coastguard Whakatane Rescue Vessel was dispatched.

The Coastguard crew spotted the men on the side of a large rock, but were unable to reach them. Rescue helicopters were unavailable to assist, so the Whakatane Surf Life Saving Club was called. Peter and Matthew Craig went out in an IRB with a borrowed spotlight, while Katherine Craig coordinated their activity from the shore. They found the men on the Ohope side of the coast beneath Kohi Point.

Matthew swam 50 metres in the dark, in rough seas, to reach the divers. One of the men was in bad shape and was unwilling to enter the water. Matthew managed to coax the man in and towed him to the IRB. The man collapsed, showing symptoms of advanced hypothermia. Matthew swam back to the rock and returned with the second man. Both men were transferred to the Coastguard vessel, then taken to the waiting ambulance at Whakatane Wharf. If rescuers had waited for the tide to go out, it is likely that the first man would have died.

Ruapehu Alpine Rescue Organisation, 3 Squadron RNZAF, Taranaki Alpine Cliff Rescue, Taranaki LandSAR

For their efforts during *Operation Labour* on Mt Taranaki, 26-29 October 2013

On Saturday 26 October 2013 the Taranaki Alpine Cliff Rescue (ACR) team was called out to search for four overdue climbers on Mt Taranaki. The weather that day had been fine with a strong wind, but was forecast to deteriorate. The missing climbers were in text contact with the Police, so the searchers knew where to locate them. Five Taranaki ACR volunteers were initially transported to Tahurangi Lodge, ready to start searching at 1am.

However, the team was soon reduced to three members. As they gained altitude the conditions worsened to gale force winds and horizontal sleet. At 4am they made the decision to return due to the weather conditions – they were 150 metres below the missing people at the time.

At first light, two of the four missing people made their own way off the mountain. They were being tracked by LandSAR teams at the time. Later, on Sunday morning, another Taranaki ACR team made an attempt to reach the two missing climbers – only to be turned back by the conditions again. By Sunday evening members of the Ruapehu

Alpine Rescue Organisation (RARO) had arrived to assist the Taranaki team. The RARO team began to run fixed ropes up the mountain to make it safer for the following teams. At first light, the Air Force attempted to fly a team to the search area; however, this attempt also failed due to the weather conditions.

Around 8am a ground team finally made it to the missing pair, to find one deceased and the other seriously hypothermic. All the available resources were being assembled and the rescuers were preparing to lower the patient in a stretcher off the mountain. About an hour later the patient died and the decision was made to pull all personnel off the mountain. At first light on Tuesday morning the RNZAF and a Taranaki ACR team recovered the bodies in near perfect conditions.

Rescuers spent almost 36 hours battling the most horrific weather conditions many of them had ever operated in, trying to reach the pair of climbers whose position was known to them. The fact that all the rescuers returned safe and well was testament to the hard, but sound, decisions being made on the mountain.

John Goldswain, Colin Larsen, Michael Hall, David Huntley, from the Life Flight Trust

For the rescue of crew from the *Sea Wanderer* in the Cook Strait on 6 January 2013

Around 6pm on 6 January 2013 the Wellington Westpac Rescue Helicopter was asked to assist a 40ft twin masted sloop battling extremely rough seas in the Cook Strait. The yacht had rolled a number of times on to its side, and the crew felt they needed to abandon it.

A cruise ship in the area had reported winds steady at around 110km/h with 12 metre waves. As the crew was preparing for the operation, helicopter pilot Mike Hall noted the difficulty of winching to and from a twin masted yacht that is being tossed around by the wind and waves. Additionally, the severe conditions were going to make flying very unpleasant. This risk assessment led to the decision to take an additional crew member on the operation.

When the helicopter arrived on scene, the crew instructed those on board the yacht to clear the rear decks of debris, and attempts were made to get the winch line to the yacht. However, the helicopter was buffeted by turbulence and the yacht could not hold a steady course or position. A highline technique was used, and the first sailor was winched off the yacht. Unfortunately, the highline was removed from the winch hook by the yacht's crew and it went overboard. The helicopter was unable to lower the winch cable back down to the yacht because the strong winds were trailing it behind the helicopter. An improvised weight was used to get the winch cable back to the deck and the second crew member was winched off just as the yacht was rolled by a massive wave.

After numerous attempts, the winch cable was eventually lowered for a third time to the yacht's skipper. He was exhausted, disorientated, unable to stand, and was not able to get in position to be winched off. The helicopter crew spent quite some time trying to get him off. Finally the yacht rolled again, and the crew used the opportunity to lift him out of the yacht's cockpit, and get him into the helicopter.

The wind and sea conditions were at the limits of the helicopter's performance, making the rescue difficult and arduous. The helicopter crew spent an hour on scene in terrible conditions to rescue the three crew members.

NZSAR Certificates of Achievement for Support Activity

These were awarded for an important contribution to search and rescue in the New Zealand Search and Rescue Region, either during 2013 or over an extended period.

Chris Astall, Nicola Hockley, Rachel MacKenzie, from Coastguard Canterbury For their efforts in developing training material for Coastguard New Zealand

Coastguard knows its greatest resource is its trained volunteers and recognises the importance of training them to ensure they not only rescue people but that they also keep themselves safe.

Its volunteers have also made it clear that when they are not involved in operations their time is best spent training. This requires a solid programme that supports the skippers and trainers to continue delivering a high standard of facilitation and training. To this end Chris, Nicola, and Rachel – three Coastguard volunteers with the necessary skills and experience – were contracted to develop practical, effective training material and resources. Over the past three years, using the latest techniques in adult learning, they have either developed or redeveloped the major training resources for the marine SAR sector. The three have also worked in partnership with Coastguard New Zealand, Tai Poutini Polytechnic and the New Zealand Search and Rescue Secretariat.

They have:

- Developed the Safe Ship Management system (SSM), required by Maritime New Zealand, which has been and implemented by Coastguard Units. The Coastguard SSM manual has drills for the ten golden rules for an SSM system, each of which has a range of different scenarios.
- Reviewed and updated Coastguard's marine training matrix, which includes redeveloping Coastguard's search and rescues training modules. These modules include both classroom and on water training.
- Developed the new Marine: Manage the Initial Response course. This material is full of real life examples, references and additional reading resources for further study.

The results of their work will make a major difference to the competency of volunteers and staff, not only within Coastguard, but across the whole marine SAR sector.

Surf Life Saving New Zealand

For the Coastal Risk Management project at Hot Water Beach

Drowning is the third highest cause of unintentional death in New Zealand. To reduce the incidence of drowning on the coast, Surf Life Saving New Zealand (SLSNZ) developed a coastal risk management strategy that provides a framework for

evidence-based drowning and injury prevention initiatives. The strategy is built around a risk assessment programme that enables the water safety sector to make informed decisions, and ensure the most-at-risk coastal locations are identified and resourced as needed.

To date, risk assessments have been conducted at over 100 of New Zealand's highest risk beaches. The recommendations have been implemented at two sites, one of which is Hot Water Beach on the east coast of the Coromandel Peninsula.

The Hot Water Beach risk assessment considered the physical hazards at the site, site use, user demographics, existing safety measures, and existing supervision and surveillance. Based on this data a risk management plan was formulated, and a range of key people at local and national levels were engaged to collectively implement the plan between 2010 and 2013. There is a range of targeted safety interventions, including an emergency phone linked to the Surfcom communications room, beach safety cards, and surf safety material developed specifically for tourists. Surf lifeguarding services have also been tailored to meet the needs of the site.

A survey of beach-goers in 2012 demonstrated that the evidence-based safety interventions implemented at Hot Water Beach were creating greater awareness of ways to stay safe on the beach. An independent evaluation also concluded that the programme was a cost effective way of informing best practice decision-making on the coastline, while reducing drowning and injury. This programme will continue to be rolled out to the other sites over the next ten years.

SLSNZ is also working with water safety agencies and other stakeholders to introduce the same evidence-based risk management approach to other aquatic environments, including rivers and inland waterways, and other marine areas.