



2020 Awards



INTRODUCTION



"I heard the helicopter ... I saw it was red and I knew it was a rescue helicopter. I knew they'd found me."

These were the words of Lincoln O'Hagan, a young boy who was rescued by the Life Flight helicopter after being swept out to sea near Wainuiomata. As Lincoln's family found out, what may start as a fun day at the beach can quickly turn into a stressful and life-threatening situation. But when that happens, New Zealand's search and rescue sector springs into action.

Nearly 13,000 people are involved in search and rescue in New Zealand, with 95 percent of them being volunteers. Each of them can be called away from their family, friends, and workplaces at a moment's notice to rescue people in distress.

Some of this year's Award recipients are being recognised for their specialist skills such as software design, flying a helicopter, or skippering a boat. Others are receiving awards for their grit and determination in harrowing weather conditions. Some are being honoured for their work that is often unseen but has a tangible impact on their community. All their work is measured in the most important currencies: lives saved, injuries prevented, and families reunited.

It is my honour to serve as Chair for a sector that ceaselessly strives to ensure people are returned to their loved ones. I hope you are inspired by reading more about this year's award recipients.

Peter Mersi
Chair
New Zealand Search and Rescue Council

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITY



Gold award

The NZSAR Gold Award for Operational Activity is awarded for a very significant contribution to search and rescue in the New Zealand Search and Rescue Region during 2020.

Bernie Pepper

Mike Beausoleil

Hannah Latta

Life Flight

For the rescue of an adult and child swept out to sea near Wainuiomata on 15 November 2020



On Sunday 15 November, the Life Flight rescue helicopter was deployed from their Wellington base to the coast off Wainuiomata. An 11-year-old boy had been swept off his feet by a wave while playing in knee-deep water, and a member of the public had jumped in the water to assist. Both had made it to a rocky outcrop 180 metres offshore before the young boy was again swept away by a wave.

When pilot Bernie Pepper, crewman Mike Beausoleil and paramedic Hannah Latta arrived on scene, a 30-knot northerly wind was blowing, creating severe turbulence and a choppy sea.

Standing at the door of the chopper, Mike scanned the water for anything out of the ordinary. Three hundred metres off the coast, he spotted the boy's red shoes.

Hannah was winched down to retrieve the boy. While he had remembered his water safety training from school and was in the 'pencil float' position, he was only just keeping his head above the water. He was hypothermic, barely conscious, and his body temperature just 26 degrees.

After bringing the boy back to shore to be treated by a waiting ambulance crew, Bernie, Mike and Hannah flew out to retrieve the member of the public who was still on the rocky outcrop. It was deemed too dangerous to deploy Hannah into the water a second time, so Bernie hovered the helicopter only a metre above the rock, in turbulent flying conditions. Hannah and Mike between them managed to get the man inside the helicopter.

While Bernie is a very experienced pilot, this was his first ever water rescue in Wellington, having only joined Life Flight a few weeks earlier.

Both the young boy, and the member of the public who went to his aid, made a full recovery.

SUPPORT ACTIVITY



Gold award

The NZSAR Gold Award for Support Activity is awarded for a very significant contribution to search and rescue in the New Zealand Search and Rescue Region.

Tim Hogan

For his commitment to search and rescue through the creation and ongoing maintenance of the Mobile Locate software service



Technical consultant Tim Hogan is the creator of Mobile Locate, a web-based software service used by emergency services staff to help locate people in distress. Since its launch in 2013, Mobile Locate has been used thousands of times.

Mobile Locate works when a person is within a cellphone coverage area, has at least five percent battery on their device, and can access mobile data. These low barriers to entry mean it is easily accessed by most outdoor users when needed.

The combination of cellphone coverage across land and marine environments in New Zealand, plus the ease of using the service, means that a lost person's location can be established within seconds. This allows the right resources to be deployed and prevents lives from being lost.

Mobile Locate is now so common that it has become a verb and a noun within emergency services call centres. Examples include "Comms, have you done a Mobile Locate?" and "Hang on, I will Mobile Locate them."

Tim is described by police staff as a humble man who has never sought recognition for his work developing a world-leading product that saves lives every week.

He has over 40 years' experience in telecommunications and IT. He draws upon this experience, and invests his own time and resources, to continually upgrade Mobile Locate so that it meets the needs of the search and rescue sector in New Zealand.

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITY



Certificate of achievement

The NZSAR Certificates of achievement for Operational Activity are awarded for an important contribution to search and rescue in the New Zealand Search and Rescue Region during 2020.

Aoraki Mt Cook Alpine Cliff Rescue Team

Aoraki Mt Cook Incident Management Team

Otago Rescue Helicopter

Rescue Coordination Centre New Zealand

**For the rescue of two climbers near Copland Pass on
10 January 2020**

On the evening of January 10 two climbers attempting the Copland Pass found themselves stuck on a small ledge with nowhere to go. Unprepared for a night out, they activated their distress beacon at 11pm. The Rescue Coordination Centre New Zealand tasked the Aoraki Mt Cook Alpine Cliff Rescue Team and the Otago Rescue Helicopter to respond.



A significant weather front was imminent with gale force winds, rain and snow expected at high elevation. The climbers were situated at 2060m (8000ft).

The Otago Rescue Helicopter, piloted by Jason Laing, located the climbers at 1am, with the aid of night vision goggles. The plan was to assess the conditions and undertake a winch rescue, but severe turbulence made this impossible.

The helicopter returned to the search base and the Incident Management Team, where a plan was created to fly the Alpine Cliff Rescue Team to the nearby Copland Shelter.

After being dropped at the Copland Shelter at 3am, Mark Evans, Jono Gillan, Khan Coleman and Jim Young began climbing in the dark across 30-degree snow slopes, establishing anchors and 200 metres of fixed ropes as they went. Mark climbed up the final snow slope, which was at a 40-degree angle, and put the two climbers into harnesses. They were then moved through the fixed rope system back to Copland Shelter.

Shortly after 6am, with a weather window of less than 20 minutes remaining, Jason executed two return trips to Copland Shelter, accompanied by winch operator Jodie Burton and intensive care paramedic Pierre Macalincag. Each landing was done toe-in so the climbers and rescuers could be loaded in as quickly as possible.

Upon arrival back at Mount Cook village one of the climbers was sent to hospital for further medical treatment but made a full recovery.

Certificate of achievement

Coastguard Nelson

Nelson Police SAR Squad

Tasman District Harbourmaster Team

Rescue Coordination Centre New Zealand

**For the rescue of six people from *SV Ocean Gem*
near Rangitoto ki te Tonga/D'Urville Island on
18-19 March 2020**

On Saturday 14 March, the Rescue Coordination Centre New Zealand was alerted to sailing vessel *SV Ocean Gem*, which was crossing the Tasman Sea en route to Picton when it sustained damage to its steering and rigging. The crew were unharmed and were able to proceed towards Picton as originally planned, using an emergency steering system.



During the evening of Wednesday 18 March, the vessel lost their emergency steering system in the Cook Strait, with winds gusting between 20 and 25 knots. Coastguard Nelson and the Nelson Police SAR Squad were tasked to respond to the vessel which had begun drifting towards Rangitoto ki te Tonga/D'Urville Island in three-metre seas.

Coastguard Nelson responded at 4am, heading out in their rescue boat on what they expected to be a three-hour journey. At the same time the *SV Ocean Gem* began drifting northwards out of Coastguard Nelson's normal range.

The Coastguard crew were granted an exemption from Maritime NZ and the Rescue Coordination Centre New Zealand to travel outside their normal range. Shortly after 7am they came across the vessel in four-metre swells and 27 knot winds.

A tow was initiated but was beset with technical difficulties and after an hour they had only covered three of the 51 nautical miles required to get back to base. Several more towing attempts were made, but it was only when the *SV Ocean Gem* started running their engine at a low speed that significant progress was made.

Partway back to Nelson, the Tasman District Harbourmaster Team met the Coastguard rescue vessel to refuel and relieve several Coastguard crew members who were seasick in the rough conditions.

The winds eased as the two boats got closer to Nelson. It was 6.30pm before the rescue vessel and the *SV Ocean Gem* berthed in Nelson, after nine hours of towing, and 14 hours after the Coastguard team had left home.

Certificate of achievement

LandSAR Turangi

Ruapehu Alpine Rescue Organisation

Taupō Police SAR Squad

National Park Police SAR Squad

Tukino Ski Patrol

For the rescue of nine climbers from the Whangaehu Glacier on Mt Ruapehu on 26-27 September 2020

Shortly before 1pm on Saturday 26 September, police were notified that a climber had fallen 200 vertical metres into the Whangaehu Glacier on Mt Ruapehu. The woman was part of a climbing party who were practising their mountaineering skills at approximately 2500m (8200ft).



The weather conditions were deteriorating rapidly, and the injured climber's eight companions were not able to rescue her or themselves. The local rescue helicopter was unable to fly due to the strong winds at the accident site. Police mobilised the Ruapehu Alpine Rescue Organisation, LandSAR Turangi and Tukino Ski Patrol for a ground rescue.

Over the course of the afternoon and early evening five rescue teams, comprising 22 people, were deployed up the mountain. The first rescue team reached the injured woman around 5.30pm and immediately started preparing for a stretcher carry.

Over the next 7.5 hours the rescue teams worked to bring the injured climber and her companions off the mountain in rapidly deteriorating weather, with gale force winds and rain. Cloud descended the mountain as nightfall came, obliterating any chance of a second attempt at a helicopter rescue.

The injured woman was placed in a stretcher which had to be carried up out of the Whangaehu Glacier using ropes and a belay system. Rescue teams worked together to pre-rig sections of the descent so that the rescue could be expedited as quickly as possible.

A search and rescue base was set up at a ski lodge in Tukino Village by the National Park and Taupō Police SAR squads. The rescue teams arrived with the injured woman at 1am, and her companions shortly afterwards.

The woman's injuries were unsurvivable and she sadly died during the descent.

SUPPORT ACTIVITY



Certificate of achievement

The NZSAR Certificates of achievement for Support Activity are awarded for an important contribution to search and rescue in the New Zealand Search and Rescue Region.

Max Corboy

For his service and commitment to Surf Life Saving New Zealand and the Otago Emergency Call Out Squad

Max Corboy caught the Surf Life Saving bug early on, obtaining his lifeguard award at 14. His search and rescue involvement started in 2010 when he joined his local callout team.



As a member of one of the busiest Emergency Call Out Squads in New Zealand, Max has been involved in many challenging callouts, including night operations, swift water rescues, body recoveries and helicopter operations. This wide range of experience has served him well in his role as the leader of the Otago Emergency Call Out Squad.

In his leadership role with the local SAR team, Max has created a high-performing team structure based around introducing new members, rotating current members and the establishment of a training group. This has resulted in team members taking their SAR experience back to their local clubs, enhancing the development of skills across the region. This way of working is now being rolled out to other regions across New Zealand.

Max's depth and breadth of experience resulted in his appointment on the Surf Life Saving National SAR Working Group, where he works with other SAR group leaders on developing policy and best practice for Emergency Call Out Squads across the country.

Max's keen interest and professional background in radio communications has led to the establishment of the Otago Digital Radio Network, which has allowed the Dunedin clubs and Emergency Call Out Squads to take their radio comms fully digital.

Max is highly regarded by local police staff, who describe him as having well and truly earned the respect of his peers and other SAR partner agencies including Coastguard, Dunedin Marine Search and Rescue, and the Otago Rescue Helicopter.

Certificate of achievement

Sergeant Vincent Ranger

For his service and commitment to search and rescue

Sergeant Vince Ranger has been a serving police officer for 42 years, with 22 of those years involving search and rescue.

After leaving school, Vince joined the New Zealand Forest Service as a labourer before qualifying to be a forest ranger. His time spent in bush environments provided him with an excellent base for his later career in search and rescue.



Vince joined the New Zealand Police in 1978 and was posted to Palmerston North. He was part of the local search and rescue squad until 1981 when he was sent to Tokoroa and then Te Awamutu. In 1992 he was promoted to Sergeant and posted to Hamilton. A posting to Whangamatā in 2001 was the start of 14 years' involvement in marine search and rescue.

These days, Vince is the police search and rescue coordinator for the Waikato district. In this role he has overseen the rescue and recovery operations for hundreds of lost people, some of which have been high-profile, weeks-long search and rescue operations.

He has been the district lead for Disaster Victim Identification (DVI) since 2014, recovering and identifying human remains in sometimes challenging conditions. He also has a lead role in emergency management, liaising with local councils and Civil Defence to undertake training and deployment – most recently as part of the COVID-19 response.

At a national level, Vince was recently called upon to assist with a recovery mission into the Pike River Mine to assist with evidence gathering. He was also part of the DVI team who worked on both the Christchurch mosque attacks and the Whakaari / White Island eruption.

Vince is described by his colleagues in the search and rescue sector as a steady hand, whose positive and friendly manner engenders confidence in every team he works with.

Certificate of achievement

Dr Charmaine Tate

For her service and commitment to search and rescue

Dr Charmaine Tate is regularly called upon by both the New Zealand Police and the Rescue Coordination Centre New Zealand at critical points during search and rescue operations.



A fellow of the Royal College of General Practitioners and a former Regimental Medical Doctor for the 1NZSAS Regiment, Charmaine provides advice about the likelihood of survival during extended search and rescue operations.

Charmaine is considered New Zealand's leading authority on ascertaining how long a person might be able to survive in the land or marine environment given the clothing, equipment and weather conditions at the time the person goes missing.

It is always a difficult decision, not made lightly, for an Incident Controller or Search Mission Coordinator to suspend search operations. This decision is made easier with Charmaine's advice and counsel. There would be very few incidents where a search operation has been suspended without her advice being sought.

Charmaine has considerable experience in many different areas of search and rescue. She commanded the Urban Search and Rescue medical teams in the aftermath of the February 2011 Christchurch earthquake and has been deployed to Afghanistan, Sumatra and Japan as part of her role as Lieutenant Colonel in the New Zealand Defence Force.

Much of Charmaine's medical training has been undertaken at her own cost, outside of the New Zealand Defence Force. She provides her advice and expertise to New Zealand's search and rescue agencies free of charge.

Certificate of achievement

Sam Milligan

For his service and commitment to LandSAR and WanderSearch in the Wairarapa region

Sam Milligan's first taste of search and rescue was 56 years ago, when a group of Scouts got into trouble crossing a river near Carkeek Hut in the Tararua Ranges.



Half a century later, Sam is still involved in search and rescue, and is considered a mainstay of LandSAR in the Wairarapa. In recent years Sam has turned his focus to the WanderSearch programme, supporting the search for people with dementia and other cognitive impairments who go missing in the community.

He acts as the conduit between the aged care and disability sectors and LandSAR. He has networked the Wairarapa rest home communities and publicised the value of WanderSearch, which has led to WanderSearch devices being used by those who need them.

Sam is responsible for maintaining the WanderSearch records and ensures that information about a missing person is readily shared with the police as the need arises. He has also taken responsibility for staging the WanderSearch tracking equipment so it is well situated within the community and can be deployed quickly.

Searching for a missing person with a WanderSearch device takes a special skill set and requires in-depth knowledge of how to use receivers and aerials. Sam has dedicated countless hours to training local volunteers and providing opportunities for them to practise their new-found skills. Volunteers consider Sam to be a role model.

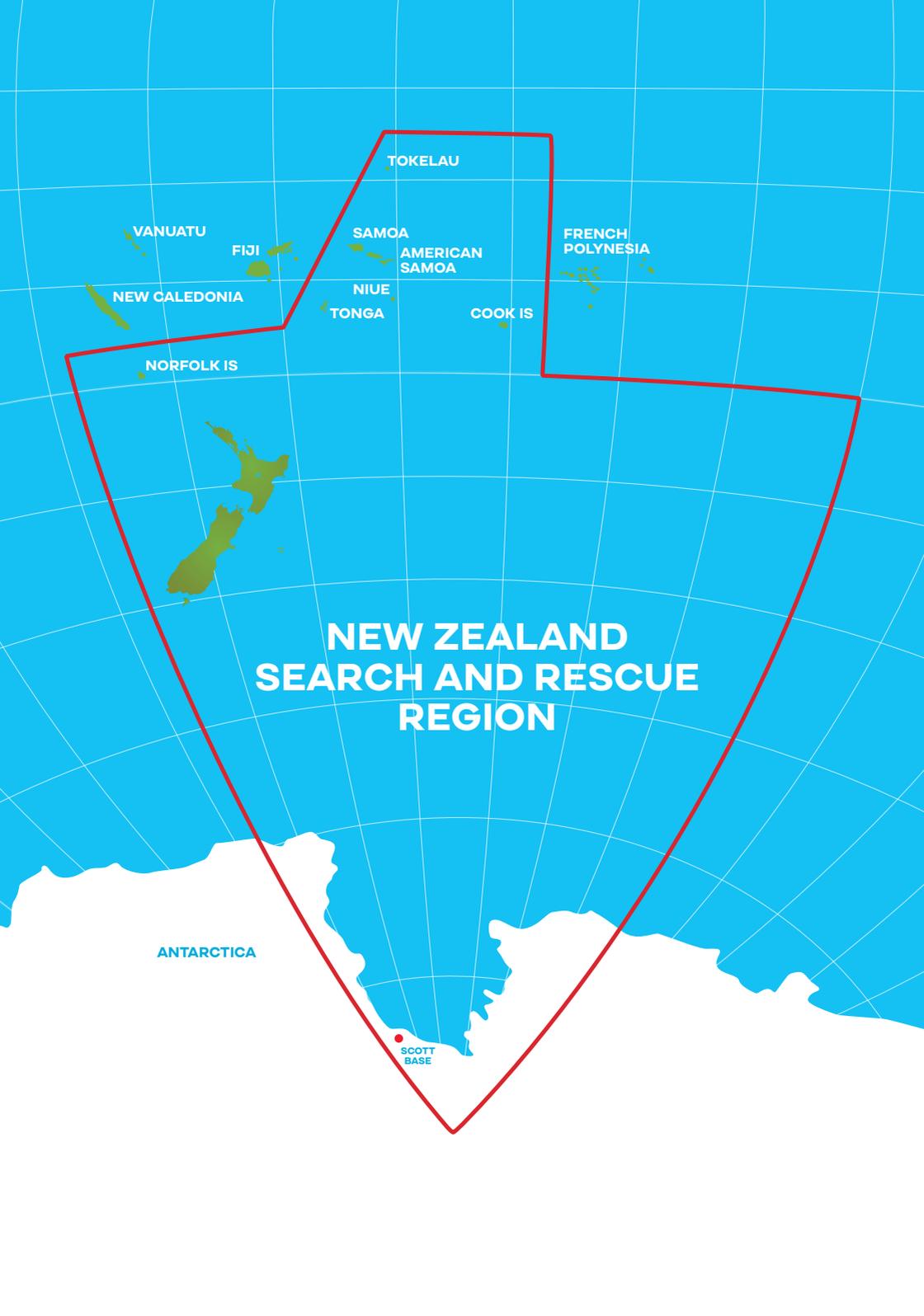
Sam has built up a special rapport with many of the elderly and cognitively impaired in the Wairarapa region, through many years of visiting them in their homes to issue WanderSearch devices. His colleagues say Sam's kindness and compassion towards those with challenging behaviours is remarkable and worthy of recognition.

The NZSAR Council and Secretariat congratulates all our 2020 winners.

Do you know an organisation, group or individual who you think should be acknowledged for their contribution to search and rescue?

There are two categories – operational activity and support activity. More information about each category, the NZSAR Awards and the nomination process can be found at nzsar.govt.nz/awards.

The 2021 Award nominations close on 31 January 2022.



TOKELAU

VANUATU

FIJI

SAMOA

AMERICAN
SAMOA

FRENCH
POLYNESIA

NEW CALEDONIA

NIUE

TONGA

COOK IS

NORFOLK IS

NEW ZEALAND SEARCH AND RESCUE REGION

ANTARCTICA

SCOTT
BASE