



Connecting the search and rescue sector

Link is a quarterly publication of
New Zealand Search and Rescue



Preparing for the worst Helicopter crash survival training

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Link is the quarterly publication of New Zealand Search and Rescue. If you have any feedback on this publication, please let us know.

info@nzsar.govt.nz | nzsar.govt.nz

Websites

nzsar.govt.nz

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

adventuresmart.nz

Safety information and tips for people planning outdoor activities

adventuresmart.nz/distress-beacons

Example of our latest SAR prevention work - promoting the carriage of beacons

beacons.org.nz

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

nzsar.govt.nz/sardonyx/index.html

Interactive dashboards using groups of records from SARdonyx, our joint search and rescue operational information system

nzsar.govt.nz/nzs-sar-guidelines/nzs-sar-guidelines-overview

New Zealand's Search and Rescue Guidelines

tpp.ac.nz/study-options/search-and-rescue

SAR multi-agency training

landsar.org.nz

Land Search & Rescue

mountainsafety.org.nz

New Zealand Mountain Safety Council

coastguard.nz

Coastguard New Zealand

surflifesaving.org.nz

Surf Life Saving New Zealand

maritimenz.govt.nz

Maritime New Zealand

watersafety.org.nz

Water Safety New Zealand

saferwalking.nz

Safer Walking NZ

COVER IMAGE

The Underwater Survivor Trainer simulator in action at the HUET course.
Courtesy New Zealand Police



SAR team take on underwater challenge

Hope for the best and prepare for the worst: not a bad principle to operate by when it comes to search and rescue training.

That was exactly the case for members of the Otago Coastal Police SAR Squad, who recently seized the opportunity to undertake the Helicopter Underwater Escape Training (HUET) course.

The training involves an extensive section of theoretical work around helicopter safety in the event of a crash over a body of water. Then things get practical.

But how do you do that without flying a helicopter into water? Southern Police partners HeliOtago have designed and constructed the answer: the Underwater Survivor Trainer.

It's a cage-like frame replicating helicopter exit points and handles, which can be lifted by forklift to be dunked underwater – and spun, to offer realism to the course.

The training covers ditching simulations, roll-overs or inversions underwater, vision impairment simulations, and the use of emergency flotation equipment and sea survival tactics.

“Obviously being in Otago Coastal means we have a large body of water to cover with some of our work,” says Sergeant Blair Dalton.

“This course gives us the opportunity to do real-time training for the worst-case-scenario event of ditching in a helicopter into some water.

“It lets us get familiar with the machine, the exit points, and the processes to escape if that ever happens.”

Along with members of the Otago Coastal Police SAR Squad, also on hand for their update of the training was Sir Richard 'Hannibal' Hayes. A legend in the realm of helicopters, Sir Richard is one of New Zealand's most experienced and respected pilots and the director of Southern Lakes Helicopters.



Sir Richard knows all too well how valuable the HUET course is, given that some of his own pilots found themselves in a nightmare scenario, forced to ditch their helicopter into the Southern Ocean just off the Auckland Islands.

“I think without the HUET course tucked under their belt, they would've been lucky to survive,” says Sir Richard.

“They said they can't remember thinking about what they were doing, it just came back on instinct from their training. This is where it all kicks in.”

This story was first published in Police Ten One magazine.

ABOVE TOP

The Underwater Survivor Trainer simulator in action at the HUET course.

BELOW

L-R: Sergeant Nathan White, Sir Richard 'Hannibal' Hayes and Sergeant Blair Dalton.

Both images courtesy New Zealand Police

Emerging technology aims to reduce search and rescue incidents

Advances in technology have affected nearly every facet of our day-to-day lives, and the outdoor is no exception. Distress beacons and GPS technology undoubtedly save lives, but what else is out there?

In this issue of Link, we look at how new technology is creating opportunities to influence behaviour to achieve better search and rescue outcomes.

Virtual reality: helping Maritime New Zealand deliver the Safer Boating message

Virtual reality is reaching communities where previously, the safer boating messages struggled to gain traction.

Matt Wood is a recreational boating senior adviser with Maritime NZ and says the scenario-based programme, which is run via an app through the wearer's virtual reality goggles, is proving very popular with the public.

The pilot, which has been trialed at various places around the country, allows the viewer to see a common scenario: the boat is hooked up to the car in the driveway, the forecast is good and they're heading out on the water for a day's fishing.

"They go to the garage and find the appropriate equipment. It's an interactive narrative which reinforces safety messages, so when you pick up the virtual VHF it tells you 'That's a good choice'."

Matt says it's not a module that simply instructs people to wear a lifejacket or carry the right comms devices.

"Virtual reality is a new channel – a different way of connecting existing messages with target audiences."

Matt says user testing of the pilot program, called Preparation, has proved popular with the crowds at public events.

"We had queues over the two days at the Southland Boat Show with people wanting to give it a go.

"Now that it's been tested and proved very successful, we're planning to expand it."

Maritime NZ invested some of its prevention programme and behaviour-change funding in the app-based technology. The agency recently released a six-year review of recreational boating fatalities, showing 96 deaths in the last six years, proving there is still work to do on prevention.

"They occurred all over the country at different times of the year, and across different craft. We're looking at a higher age demographic than previously appreciated – the over 45s, 55s and the over 65s - and people are dying in small craft, quite close to shore."

Matt says the idea to use VR was moved forward upon the suggestion of several harbourmasters over the past few years. It's a timely education tool, especially when considering that geographically a quarter of the country's harbours and waterways are not covered by bylaws or don't have a harbourmaster.

"No single local authority or entity could afford the entire package, so I found a way to bring the idea back to Maritime NZ, we got good buy-in and advanced it."



"They go to the garage and find the appropriate equipment. It's an interactive narrative which reinforces safety messages, so when you pick up the virtual VHF it tells you 'That's a good choice!'"

Matt says Maritime NZ's investment was used to establish the platform, write the module, and get it going.

"Once you have the goggles you can run the programme. We've had three councils buy goggles to run it, meaning they got into virtual reality for about \$800, as opposed to the tens of thousands it costs to purchase the programme and the headsets."

Matt says there are plans to develop the programme so that people can see, in virtual settings, challenging sea conditions and bar crossings.

"Early in 2022 we hope to develop more modules. In short, virtual reality can teach, convey, test – anything you can imagine, you can do with virtual reality."

Boating app prompts big increase in trip reporting

An electronic app developed by Coastguard has led to a noticeable increase in boaties logging trip reports.

The Coastguard App, was redesigned and re-launched three years ago with the added feature of trip reporting, alongside provision of its standard weather and VHF channel information.

Coastguard's Technology Analyst/Support Nico Doodeman says there's clear evidence to show that boaties who might have been reluctant to use an open-channel VHF radio to log a trip report, are using the app.

"This is fantastic from a safety point of view. We're absolutely delighted we're capturing that audience."

Nico says the app has had close to 50,000 downloads since the re-launch in 2018. The new version containing the trip report feature was first launched in Coastguard's Northern Region, which extends from Cape Reinga to Kawhia.

Nico says about 30 percent of the trip reports from this region are now done via the app.

"If we pull out the data and look at these trip reports, about half are people who used to call us on the radio and who are now using the app. The other half are people who didn't usually log trip reports, but now do because there's an electronic means of doing so."

The app's key features include a function for boaties to save their favourite spots, plus nowcasting and forecasting features and the trip report function which also serves as a safety watch system.

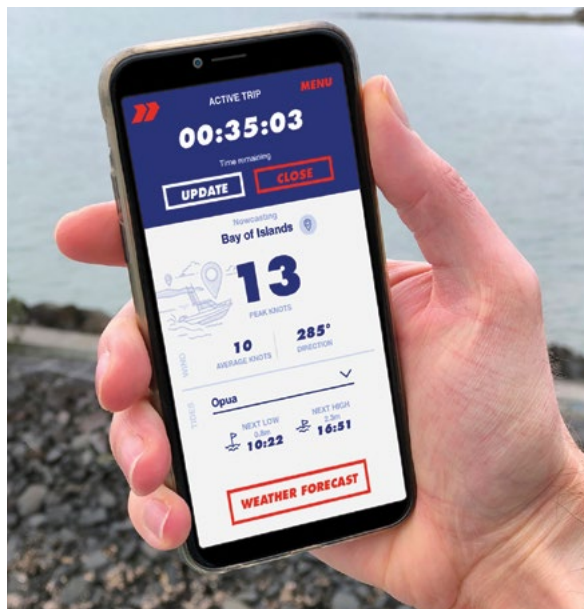
"If you give the app the permission to do so, we will get a position from your phone every couple of minutes while you are on the water. This data can be valuable in a search and rescue scenario.

"We will know exactly where your last known position is from your last ping. That's a lot more accurate than simply knowing you've left Westhaven Marina."

The app is also proving a useful tool for ensuring boaties sign off at the end of their trip. Nico says a large proportion of trip reports logged via VHF are not closed off.

"With the Coastguard App, every trip you make you have to nominate someone on shore as an emergency contact."

At 30 minutes overdue the user will be sent a push notification to advise them to update the trip report or close it. Another is sent at 60 minutes and at 90 minutes another reminder is sent, plus a text message is sent to the emergency contact.



"In the majority of cases the emergency contact is able to resolve the situation and they never have to call us."

"That person is then responsible for contacting the authorities if they can't resolve the situation. It might mean checking the boat ramp first to see if the vessel is there or contacting other people on the boat."

"Coastguard will then make an assessment based on the information to hand."

That might include knowing they're in a cell phone black spot.

"We'd work with the informant to identify if there's a cause for concern and as soon as it tips over in the risk matrix, then it becomes a search and rescue incident and Police are advised."

"In the majority of cases the emergency contact is able to resolve the situation and they never have to call us."

The app can be used by yachties planning coastal voyages, but users have to be within cell phone range.

"Coastal voyages can be logged on the app but updates still have to be managed through VHF when outside cell phone coverage," Nico says.

The app also allows the user to upload a photo of their vessel which aids emergency services in the event of an incident.

Significant milestone for avalanche system

The NZ Mountain Safety Council's Avalanche Advisory service will celebrate its 25th season this coming winter. The platform forecasts the avalanche risk across 12 alpine regions; 10 of which are in the South Island, with Aoraki/Mt Cook operating year-round.

Operations manager Nathan Watson says the changes in technology that can be used to communicate the avalanche dangers has improved massively in that time, and feedback indicates it's an essential decision-making tool.



LEFT
Trampers considering signage in the Wellington region.
Courtesy Caleb Smith



"We could see there was plenty of insight to show that inadequate planning and preparation contribute to a large proportion of search and rescue call-outs, injuries and even fatalities."

Adventure planning app incorporates advice from across the web

In a world where it's possible to order food, hire a holiday house and book a flight online via a mobile device, it seemed odd there was nothing similar for planning a hike in the mountains.

That was, until this year, when the NZ Mountain Safety Council launched Plan My Walk – a digital trip planning app and website that works on both mobile devices and desktop computers.

The app incorporates multiple elements of outdoor trip planning, including thousands of walking tracks, alerts and weather information. It's had a strong start, with 85,000 unique users as of early November.

"We're aiming for a lot more but it's a very positive start," says operations manager Nathan Watson.

Development began in June 2020, with an initial version launched in early May 2021 followed by an extensive update in October.

Nathan says what makes it unique is that it brings all the information together on a single platform, as opposed to users searching through multiple, separate information sources.

The app features MetService weather warnings and watches, Department of Conservation track, hut and campsite alerts, New Zealand Avalanche Advisory forecasts, and special alerts such as a rāhui (a tapu area where access might be restricted) or where there's Kauri dieback.

Nathan says they were very clear from the outset about what they wanted to achieve, and what the app wasn't – a navigation tool or an emergency communications device when you're in the field.

"We could see there was plenty of insight to show that inadequate planning and preparation contribute to a large proportion of search and rescue call-outs, injuries and even fatalities.

"We decided to look into how to reduce those planning failures and Plan My Walk is one of the strategy pieces to address that."

Nathan says it's been easy to promote through the support of the Council's member and partner organisations. It will be the subject of a dedicated marketing campaign over summer, including collaboration with well-known sportspeople Richie and Gemma McCaw.

New space for women in SAR

A newly created Facebook group aims to be a place for women in SAR – and those supporting them – to share information and learn from each other.

The Facebook group, created in October, was the result of a chance conversation at the 2021 SAR Managers course held at the Royal NZ Police College in Porirua.

Claire Pettigrew, of the Wellington LandSAR group, was on the course alongside Josie Beswick from Coastguard. As the only two female volunteers on the course, they naturally turned to each other as a sounding board.

"We wanted to create a space for women to share tips with each other, learn from each other, and in time have some in-depth conversations about our role in the SAR world," says Claire. "Before the group was created, there were very few cross-sector opportunities for women to discuss where to find small-sized rain pants, or how to balance being a SAR volunteer with being a mum."

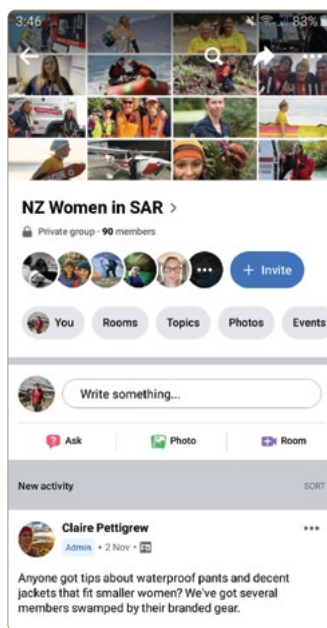
Membership of the group isn't limited to women, however. Anyone interested in supporting women within the search and rescue sector is welcome to join.

Facebook was chosen as it's an easy-to-use platform that a lot of people are familiar with. So far, there are members from LandSAR, Coastguard, Civil Defence, Surf Life Saving NZ, Police and NZSAR. The group is moderated by volunteers from LandSAR, Surf Life Saving NZ and Coastguard.

"It would be great to see a woman new to SAR be able to post a question, and straight away get some advice from others who are more experienced," says Claire.

"Women don't always feel empowered to speak up, especially in group settings, so my hope is that we'll be able to provide a forum for ad-hoc mentoring and support."

The Facebook group can be found by searching 'NZ Women in SAR' on Facebook.



"We wanted to create a space for women to share tips with each other, learn from each other, and in time have some in-depth conversations about our role in the SAR world."

LEFT
The Plan My Walk app has a gear checklist feature.
Courtesy Caleb Smith

Welcome Matt and Evan



The Secretariat's new Senior Advisor / Kaitohutuhu Matua Matt Wheble is a familiar face to many in the SAR sector, having come to us from a long career with the New Zealand Police.

Based within the Secretariat team in Wellington, Matt has picked up the innovation and technology workstreams that were previously managed by Carl van der Meulen. He will also be looking after the Operational Framework; the guiding document for the coordination of SAR services within the New Zealand search and rescue region.

"I'm looking forward to bringing my operational experience to the wider SAR sector," says Matt. "I hope this will contribute to the ongoing work to ensure New Zealand has effective search and rescue services".

It's a big change from his 15 years in Police, including 13 years involved in SAR at the district and national level. His most recent role was National Coordinator for Emergency Management and Disaster Victim Identification (DVI). He was also involved in the Police COVID-19 response, coordinating the sourcing and distribution of personal protective equipment for staff.

His time as a member of Police SAR and DVI squads has left a lasting impression on Matt.

"One of the highlights was seeing and working with such diverse groups of people, who come together to take part in a search. No matter what the team members' backgrounds were, everyone worked together, for the greater good.

"The biggest buzz was being able to repatriate someone to their family. That made all the time spent running operations or planning searches very worthwhile."

Matt's looking forward to a more relaxed pace of life with NZSAR. This is the first time in over a decade he hasn't been on call, and he intends to fit in as many tramping, trail running and mountain biking trips as his weekends will allow.

Prior to joining Police, Matt managed outdoor retail stores in Porirua and Petone, and has a decent-sized collection of maps and outdoor books which come in handy when it's too wet to head outside. "If I'm not outside doing it, I'm reading about it, or planning my next trip."

Matt can be reached at m.wheble@nzsar.govt.nz.



Evan Hughes has recently been appointed as Senior Advisor / Kaitohutuhu Matua for the Secretariat, where his focus will be steering the Volunteer Engagement Survey.

Evan's interest in survival outdoors was honed in the outback of Western Australia, where salt-water crocodiles lurk, and where rivers flood mudflats so fast they can trap vehicles.

"I'm a surfer and a diver so I like getting out there. In Australia I learned a lot about self-reliance, in terms of vehicle maintenance and survival skills – think saltwater crocs, humidity, and rivers with 10-metre tides that will trap your vehicle.

"Self-reliance in extreme and isolated environments is one of the reasons I find this sector so fascinating."

Evan is a Wellington local but spent half of his early years in the UK, where he studied French at the University of Leeds. His love of languages and other cultures led him towards studying te reo and tikanga Māori at Te Wānanga o Aotearoa when he returned to New Zealand.

He has worked as a language assistant in France and New Caledonia; a skill which came in handy when he worked at Statistics New Zealand.

"I was tasked with convincing the members of French-Canadian circus act Cirque du Soleil to fill in their census forms. They weren't having a bar of it - they are pretty much the rock stars of the circus world."

Evan and his wife, a marine biologist, returned to New Zealand five years ago, from Kununurra, Western Australia, 1000km south of Darwin.

"My wife was setting up a marine park and I was working in public education and doing a lot of fishing."

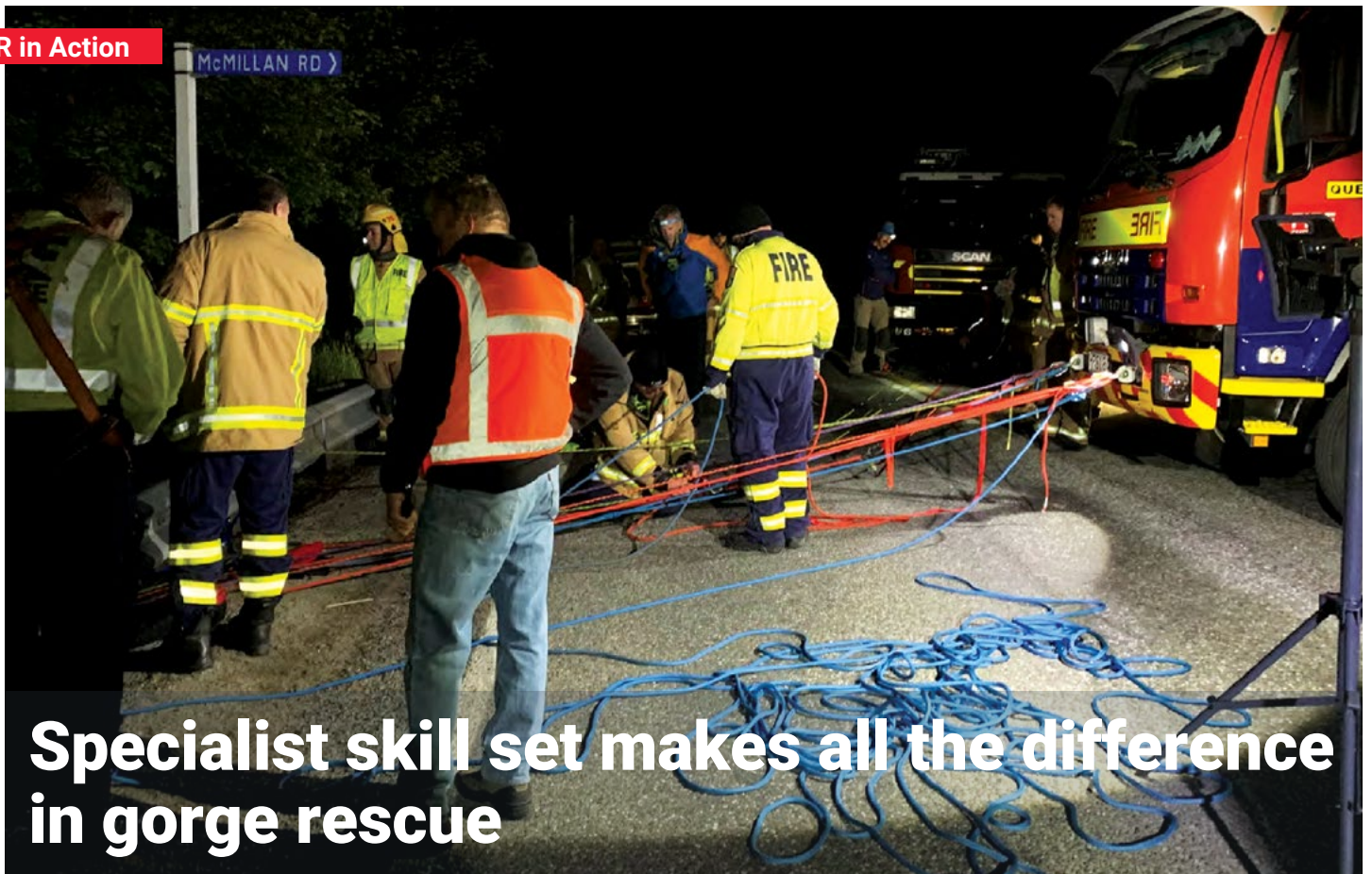
Evan says the Volunteer Engagement Survey will involve four of the sector's larger non-Governmental organisations (NGOs): Surf Life Saving NZ, LandSAR, Coastguard and the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA).

This survey could be conducted annually and will capture attitudes towards volunteer satisfaction, barriers to participation and retention, for example.

He says the results of the survey, which could potentially involve up to 25,000 volunteers, will feed into several projects now underway. Questions around barriers to participation will likely drive other research including NGOs' retention strategies.

"The recent growth of the sector and funding means that it's a really exciting time to be working in the SAR sector," Evan says.

You can contact Evan at e.hughes@nzsar.govt.nz or 022 011 0062.



Specialist skill set makes all the difference in gorge rescue

Shortly after midnight on 22 November 2020, Police were notified that a young male had disappeared while walking above the Shotover River, east of Queenstown.

After arriving at the scene, Police interviewed his two companions and established that all three of them had been standing between the metal road barrier and the cliff before one of them slipped and fell into the gorge. His companions had tried to establish voice contact with him, with no response.

The weather at the time was marked by constant drizzle, with strong southerly winds and a temperature around five degrees. The Queenstown-based Otago Rescue Helicopter was tasked to complete a reconnaissance of the area and establish the man's position in the gorge. They were able to complete a short aerial survey, without locating the man, before the high winds made it impossible for them to continue and they were stood down.

Within 30 minutes of the phone call to Police, Gorge Road was closed to oncoming traffic and the Queenstown and Arrowtown Fire and Emergency NZ (FENZ) units arrived on site. The Arrowtown unit included the specialist Line Rescue Team which covers the wider Wakatipu area.

Together with the Line Rescue team leader, Police quickly determined that the rescue was likely to be beyond the technical capacity of the Line Rescue Team. Wanaka-based Detective Alan Lee was brought in to assume command and to coordinate the overall response. While en route from Wanaka, Alan contacted the Queenstown Alpine Cliff Rescue team – part of the Wakatipu LandSAR group – to request assistance.

In the meantime, the Line Rescue Team worked to establish the man's position in the gorge. St John paramedics arrived on site and set up a designated receiving area where the man could be stabilised and prepared for transfer to hospital. The two FENZ appliances were set up as anchors for several rescue lines.

At 1.30am – just over an hour from the initial phone call to Police – a member of the Line Rescue Team descended into the Shotover Gorge. Twenty metres below the road, they found a small ledge with a cap, gumboot and other personal items belonging to the man. They could also hear the missing man shouting for help, confirming that he was still alive and hadn't fallen into the river.

A second Line Rescue Team member was then dispatched into the gorge, bypassing their colleague on the ledge. They were able to establish voice contact with the man but were not able to reach his location due to the nature of the terrain.

By 2am the Queenstown Alpine Cliff Rescue Team had arrived on site and shortly afterwards began their descent into the gorge. They located the man at the base of the cliff, another 20 metres past the ledge – a total fall of around 40 metres. He was seriously injured with head, shoulder, and back injuries.

Due to the vegetation and terrain surrounding the man's landing spot, as well as his injuries, the rescue teams had considerable difficulty preparing him for extraction in a stretcher.

As the man was being prepped for extraction, the St John Ambulance team ran a practice session with FENZ and Police staff on how to transition the patient from the stretcher to the ambulance. This was necessary to ensure the transfer was as efficient as possible, without making the man's injuries any worse.

Around 3.30am the extraction began, with the injured man being hauled vertically up the cliff face, accompanied by a member of the Alpine Cliff Rescue team. The terrain was steep to vertical with loose rock and vegetation.



“We had 12 FENZ crew providing the motive power on the rescue lines,” says Alan, “but the terrain was so difficult that it took over 40 minutes to haul the two of them 40 vertical metres.”

Shortly after 4am, the injured man arrived at the road, where he was stabilised and then moved into the waiting ambulance. Queenstown FENZ provided a crew member to drive the ambulance so the ambulance officers could focus on keeping their patient stable. The remaining rescue teams were extracted from the gorge a short time later, just as heavy rain set in.

“The area where the man was located was only a few metres above the Shotover River,” says Alan. “If he’d continued falling, or had attempted to self-rescue, he would have been at risk of falling into the river. With the extent of his injuries, he quite likely would have died.”

Given the technical nature of the rescue, and the number of agencies involved, elements of the Coordinated Incident Management System (CIMS) structure was used.

Each organisation was able to maximise the use of their assets and resources through having clearly defined responsibilities for control, logistics, operations, safety and welfare, Alan says.

“Whilst the operation was under the overall command of Police, actual control of the extraction was handled by the team leaders from the Alpine Cliff Rescue and Line Rescue teams.”

“This rescue simply wouldn’t have been possible without the individual actions – and collective response – of the highly skilled and experienced teams who came together that night.”



TOP LEFT

FENZ appliances were used as anchors.
Courtesy Alan Lee

TOP

Twelve FENZ crew provided the motive power to bring the injured man to safety.
Courtesy Alan Lee

RIGHT

The location of the man's fall and the spot where he was found.
Courtesy Alex Holden

Entries welcomed for NZ Search and Rescue Awards

Nominations are now open for the 2021 NZ Search and Rescue Awards, to be held in May 2022 in Wellington.

The NZSAR Awards, now more than 20 years-old, recognise worthy achievements within New Zealand's search and rescue region.

NZSAR Senior Advisor Communications and Prevention Tania Seward coordinates the nominations process and says it's one of the most rewarding parts of her role.

"We know there is some amazing work going on across the sector. It's a real pleasure to be able to ring someone and say they've been chosen for an award, and would they like to come to Wellington to accept it in person."

The Awards cover two categories: operational activity and support activity.

The operational category is open to SAR operations that took place between 1 January and 31 December 2021 and were coordinated by either Police or the Rescue Coordination Centre New Zealand.

"The search and rescue sector responded to nearly 3,000 incidents last year, of which 15 or 20 usually get nominated in the operational category. They tend to represent the most technically demanding rescues, or the ones where extenuating circumstances brought out the best in the rescue teams."

"Even the ones that don't get selected for an award make for challenging and inspiring reading for the selection panel."

The support category is open to individuals, groups or organisations which have made a significant contribution to search and rescue in New Zealand. A common misconception is that you need decades of service to be considered for an award in the support category, but that's not the case at all, Tania says.

"Some of the previous winners have only been in SAR for a handful of years. It's more about the impact that they've had on the search and rescue sector. We've recognised people whose technical expertise has guided a search, or whose leadership has transformed teams, or whose initiatives has made a real difference to search and rescue."

"If in doubt – put in a nomination!"

The impact of the Awards goes beyond the official ceremony, often leading to increased exposure for search and rescue teams across New Zealand.

"The 2020 NZSAR Awards got featured in 13 news outlets, including a piece on 1News Tonight", says Tania. "Reading about the NZSAR Awards in the paper or online might just be the push that someone needs to send off an application to become a volunteer, or donate money to support the sector, and that can only be a good thing."

Entries for the 2021 NZSAR Awards close on 31 January 2022.



Top tips for NZSAR Award nominations

Operational nominations:

- Facts and figures are helpful: What was the temperature, wind speed, or altitude at the time of the rescue?
- Make sure you've listed all the agencies involved in the rescue
- Focus on the action/s which had the most impact on how the rescue unfolded.

Support nominations:

- A short biography covering the person or organisation's history in SAR can be useful
- If the person's activities, or the community initiative, affect more than one organisation, consider a joint nomination
- Clearly convey the impact of the person or organisation on the local community, organisation, or wider SAR sector.

Next steps

The nomination form, NZSAR Awards policy and details of previous winners can be found on the NZSAR website: nzsar.govt.nz/awards.

Completed nominations should be sent to info@nzsar.govt.nz or posted to the NZSAR Secretariat, PO Box 3175, Wellington 6011.

TOP
2020 NZSAR awards held at Parliament.
Courtesy Mark Coote

10 questions with ...

Lorna Gribble

Waikato WanderSearch Trust chair and secretary Lorna Gribble knows only too well how huge New Zealand is, especially to those who go missing, and those tasked with finding them. The avid trumper explains a little more about her role within a vital organisation which supports at-risk people to live healthy, active lifestyles.

How long have you been involved in SAR?

I joined the Hamilton LandSAR group in 2012. Soon after, I was approached by the head of the local Police SAR squad and asked if I would be interested in WanderSearch. He could see it was going to grow and expand to include clients beyond those linked to the Dementia Society.

WanderSearch is one of several technologies that supports the Safer Walking Framework in New Zealand. It applies to people with cognitive impairment who are at risk of going missing.

How many people are involved with the Trust?

There are five trustees. We're incredibly low-key but needed a platform for handling the funding side of things. I have one other volunteer helping me – I still like to be able to get away now and then with my husband in the motorhome.

There's also a fair bit of work involved in keeping track of the actual devices; making sure they are correctly distributed and maintained.

What encouraged you to get involved?

I grew up on a farm in the King Country and my father had often gone bush looking for hunters or farmers who were delayed. Later one of my brothers became involved in search and rescue in Taumarunui.

It complements tramping. I do a lot of day walking in the Waikato and now I'm also doing a bit of bait line maintenance for the Pirongia Te Aroaro o Kahu Restoration Society.

Where is your favourite tramping destination?

I love being on the tops - most people do. On a beautiful day you can see forever, especially in places like the Kahurangi (North-West Nelson). It's just spectacular.

This little country is actually huge and I'm sure there are still untouched gullies where no one has ever been. We have 1400 hectares of bush on our own property, and I love walking the back-ridges of our farm.

You're now retired; what was your occupation before then?

I was a medical laboratory scientist involved in diagnostic testing, so I'm following the COVID-19 story with great scientific interest.

What's changed since you started volunteering?

The number of clients has increased a lot in the Waikato. We hover around 66 but it varies.



Technology has also changed. When I started very few even had email, so I was on the phone a lot or meeting people in person. There is now a broader range of technology available, and GPS technology has been a substantial change, but it has limitations – everything costs.

Do you get to head out on searches?

I've been called out two or three times. In parts of the country some of the LandSAR volunteers are involved in WanderSearch and are actively searching for clients. Each Police district handles it differently.

What has stood out to me on those occasions is the buzz you get when you hear the little beep of the device and you go, 'yes, I'm in the right area'.

What do you do to relax?

Aside from tramping, we have a gully behind our house in Hamilton where I'm slowly getting rid of weeds and replacing them with native plants.

What's the most unexpected thing that's happened to you while volunteering?

It's a real privilege to be allowed in someone's home at a time they're vulnerable because the person they love and care for is causing them stress.

What's one key message you'd like to pass on to others?

Don't assume that someone with dementia isn't capable of walking further than you might think. Someone with this condition might believe they are far younger, and fuelled by an extra amount of adrenalin, they might be capable of doing something the family might not have thought possible. You have to be open to all possibilities and that's typical of all searching.

WanderSearch (also known as Wandatrak in some parts of New Zealand) supports people living in the community who are at risk of going missing to live healthy active lifestyles.

At risk people are provided with a small device that can be found by Police and trained volunteers using specialised equipment. For more information see wandersearchnz.org.nz.



Duncan's desk

Kia ora koutou

Summer is just around the corner, and if the forecasts are to be believed, we're in for a hot, dry few months. As much as I'm looking forward to getting away from the desk, signs are that it's going to be a summer unlike any other.

While the holiday season is always a busy time for the sector, the implications of COVID-19 have added additional complexity. Just as everyday New Zealanders have grappled with the idea of vaccine passports and the traffic light system, search and rescue agencies have been working through how they can still provide a vital, life-saving service while keeping their people safe. A lot of work is being done to ensure our sector has the people and systems in place to provide a seamless and safe service to the public.

I'm pleased to welcome Matt Wheble and Evan Hughes to the Secretariat. They're providing more capacity across our various workstreams and picking up the work previously done by Carl van ver Meulen. Matt and Evan's contact details are on page 7.

The Secretariat's planned two-day Aviation Workshop was curtailed by COVID-19, but quickly pivoted to a two-hour online session. It was great to see aviation operators, the Rescue Coordination Centre NZ, Police, Ambulance AirDesk and others come together to learn more about each other and put some pressing issues on the table. While we couldn't replicate the discussions planned for a face-to-face meeting, we've got a solid foundation for when the workshop proper happens early next year.

The Secretariat recently engaged an external contractor to review our communications channels, including this magazine. The review was based on qualitative interviews with people from around the sector and confirmed that our investment into our communications programme is valued. It also highlighted some areas of improvement for us, particularly around our digital presence, which will help us reach more people within the SAR sector. I'm looking forward to seeing how this work unfolds over the coming months and years.

We also relaunched our distress beacons marketing campaign, which first appeared last summer. The evidence is unequivocal – having a distress beacon means that people are found quickly and efficiently whether they're tramping in the hills, on a fishing trip, hunting with friends or flying a plane. This year's campaign has been expanded with ads across social media, news websites and outdoor retailers



encouraging people to “Make memories, not the 6pm news,” Get lost in nature, not lost in the bush,” and “Take the search out of search and rescue.”

Lastly, I'd like to recognise the volunteers who make up 91 percent of the SAR sector in New Zealand. While International Volunteer Day – Sunday 5 December – is only one day, our volunteers are on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. I acknowledge the interrupted Christmas lunches, the missed bedtime stories, and the workdays that are turned upside down when a callout comes in. Our SAR sector is strengthened by your passion, commitment, and dedication to the job.

I hope you and yours get the opportunity for a break this holiday season.

Stay safe,

Duncan Ferner
NZSAR Secretariat Director

ABOVE
Take the 'search' out of search and rescue campaign poster.

