

SAR SEARCH WHITE ISLAND WATER COURSE: HOT DEBRIEF

Sunday 15 December 2020

1430hrs

AIM: To locate missing persons Person's 'A' and 'B'.

TASK OUTLINE: 8 Police Search and Rescue staff to go to White Island and search the water course from the Last Known Point of Person 'B' through to the beach head.

Search plan. To conduct probe line search of water course identifying potential eddying points and snag locations for a body being shifted by external water or debris source.

75 minute on scene deployment time.

METHOD OF DEPLOYMENT: Air insertion and extraction by two Civilian Helicopters from Section 9(2)(a) Official Information Act 1982. Accompanying SAR team is Medical Emergency Officer from NZ Army.

Supported by Police Launch Deodar and Police Divers.

RNZN Wellington with two RHIBS deployed with medical staff for immediate extraction in emergency.

RNZN Seasprite helicopter on alert station on HMNZS Wellington.

Top Air Cover provided by Police Eagle helicopter with GNS Scientist on board providing eyes on visual of White Island.

HEALTH AND SAFETY: Level three PPE for all 8 SAR personnel to be deployed on Island. Equipped with gas meters and FENZ BA Equipment in emergency.

All other active staff in vicinity of Island, Helicopter pilots, Medical Officer, RHIB Crew and Medics, Deodar Crew plus dive team equipped with Level 2 PPE and Gas monitoring equipment

COMMUNICATIONS: Teams on the ground communicated with helicopters, RHIBS and Deodar via Simplex 2 relayed through Eagle. Deodar provided regular sitreps via Whakatane channel to EOC.

DEBRIEF:

The aim was not achieved in that Persons 'A' and 'B' were not located. The task was achieved with success as the probe line was conducted through the designated area delivering a probability of success "**very unlikely**" that persons 'A' or 'B' remain on the island.

TIMINGS:

All timings were met and all timings were appropriate for the plan.

POLICE: Refresher training and exertion exercise with BA provided reassurance to team members.

Hydration prior utilising sports supplement drinks and good medical advice was key to success of team members.

PPE equipment was good and easy to use. Provided reassurance to the teams.

Team entry to scene from Helo was smooth with no issues.

Started search at Last Known Point of 'B'.

Probe line across creek at even spread. Team leader as safety officer moving without probe behind team and maintain visual watch whilst maintain radio Comms.

Identified varying ground depths and fill ranging from sand and heavy sediment to rock. Sediment described as loose on top at about 100mm in depth.

Probes had to break through a crust layer under the sediment on occasion.

Probes into banks on side of water course identified that soft ground was over 1.5 metres deep.

Whilst probes were a good length the steel used tended to flex. Suggestion utilising stainless steel probe rods in the future.

Probe depth varied from 50mm to over 150cm.

In places the ground was bubbling and the team moved cautiously through these areas.

Gas metre readings never got higher than 0.4 which is within acceptable numbers.

Team members conducted a team welfare check half way through task before continuing on. Nil issues identified. Consideration of throat microphones or similar when using breathing apparatus as getting messages out was difficult. Nil issues with hearing communication.

Team completed task before focussing on tidal pool at beach head. Pool approx. 7m x 4m. Pool was not able to be seen into due to murk and tide was high lapping into the pool. The edges surrounding were soft sand.

Dead fish and branches were visible floating on the top. The side banks were sand and soft. Depth was unknown.

Sand build up was gradual slope with limiting factor of preventing fast moving water flow from holding up.

s9(2)(a) – *The pool is not a major holding pool and forms when a southerly comes through pushing the sand bank up the beach. Generally it is low and a person can wade through it.*

Investigation - identified that Aerial photographs through week show little to no water in pool on Monday 9th and Tuesday 10th indicating a low probability that persons 'A' or 'B' are present.

On consideration the likelihood of the pool holding a person was low. Determined low likelihood of success.

Nil gas levels registered at beach head / jetty area.

Helicopter extraction was quick and efficient with no issues identified.

Decontamination process at Whakatane Airfield went well with no issues.

HELICOPTERS: Excellent briefing by Pilots to team. Conducted dry run loading and disembarking that was valuable on the ground.

Pilots – Good brief and happy with task. Worked well with team and found COMMS plan worked well.

Comment via Army Medical Officer that it felt like being in a Defence Force Machine and was impressed with the level of professionalism shown.

NZDF: Minimal input from group Officer in Command as no issues identified. Good Communication levels with no issues identified.

Section 6(a) Official Information Act 1982

**Section 9(2)
(a) Official** WBOP SAR/DVI tasked.

GNS: Scientist in Eagle as visual platform described as an excellent vantage point to gain a good understanding of risk and to identify any potential changes that may indicate a change in volcanic state that would affect the teams. Much better than when previously positioned on HMNZS Wellington. Communication with GNS team member monitoring data at EOC was good.

FENZ: Decontamination went well at Whakatane airfield with the system working well. SAR team queried the need to wear Respirators in Decom shower. Advised that without they would not be able to breath due to the spray. Identified that single filter respirators still had trouble breathing in shower where those on double filters had no issues.