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# NZLSAR News

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**Brian Ahern 29. 08. 1943 - 20. 03.2000**

The news of Brian Ahern's death after a massive heart attack on Monday morning 20 March shocked all who knew him. Two services have been held for him, one in the grounds of a favourite park in Wanaka and the other in the Hutt Valley Club Rooms. Some 350 attended the Wanaka service which was held under a huge sequoia tree on a clear sunny Central Otago day and was a moving two hour reminiscence of Brian's life. The Lower Hutt function which also touched on his



**Brian Ahern  
Outdoorsman**

extensive outdoor activities was attended by 70 or so of his friends, relatives, neighbours and fellow DoC workers including the Director General, Hugh Logan, and Paul Dale representing NZLSAR. Brian was a trumper, skier, mountaineer, explorer in Antarctica, helped build hospitals in Nepal, conservationist, NZLSAR Land Adviser, heavily involved in SAR in Queenstown, Chairman of the Regional Committee and much more. For all who knew him or were assisted unknowingly through his organisational skills we are all richer for our association with Brian and very much the poorer for his passing. To his wife Rosemary and their children Maryanne, Paul, Helen and Zena his mum, our thoughts are with you.

Thinking on my friendship with Brian I wrote in 1995 in the first edition of the News of how I became involved in the outdoor activities that I have followed for near a lifetime. I reprint below a small part of that article.

*My outdoor interests became more focused when in 1959 I moved from the then very small town of Taradale to complete my apprenticeship at the Hutt.*

*I met Brian Ahern now a DoC Officer at Queenstown, then a resident of Korokoro under the second lamp on the Ewen Bridge at 7 45 pm on a Wednesday night and was*

*taken to a meeting of the Hutt Valley Tramping Club. And so began 30 plus years of tramping, climbing, skiing, etc. The club has always been strong in SAR and I was lucky to have the guidance of some very good people in accepting this responsibility. I went on my first rescue not long after joining the club and have been active at all levels since.*

Without a doubt the HVTC and the activities that I pursued with them have had a major influence on the person I am now. If ever there is a defining watershed in my life it was that meeting with

Brian on the Ewen Bridge. I owe much to Brian as do so many others and with his warm smile and friendly chuckle, will be greatly missed by us all.

**John P Tristram**  
National Field Officer

## Reference notes re the use of Search Dogs

This paper is a guide to Search Coordinators and Controllers as to the use of Police Dogs in the role of Search and Rescue. When considering the use of a dog, the handler is the expert and should be consulted early. They will be able to advise whether a dog can be used in the circumstances and how to get the best results from their use.

Police dogs are now being specifically trained in the area of Search and Rescue (this also includes the training of the handler in relation to survival skills). Tests done with these dogs have shown that these dogs can effectively track an 18 hour old track, and depending on weather and other conditions up to 36 hours old. Don't discount us because you think that the track might be too old.

### Tracking

Police dogs are able to track people by following a line of scent on the ground. We do not need a "scent article" (a scent article is an item of clothing which has the lost person's scent on it) however we do need a starting point. So if searchers in the field locate positive sign it is a good idea to call in a dog team to see if they can locate a track. This will speed up the tracking process considerably. Visual tracking is very time consuming, however a dog following a line of scent is only slowed by the speed that the handler can move at. Obviously the lost party can be located a lot faster if a dog is used and this could mean the difference between life and death in some cases.

If field searchers locate a positive line of footprints then they should stop and call a dog in. They should not continue or contaminate the track by fanning out and wandering around the area. The dog will need to be put into the area ahead of where the searchers have already been. If the searchers have moved around the area it is important that they are honest about where they have been and advise the dog handler.

The dog's ability to track will depend in the following factors: **weather, terrain, bush canopy and its density and contamination**

Consult the handler as they are the experts and will be best able to advise you on how to best deploy the team.

### Scenting

Police Dogs can also be used to search a designated area for articles (such as packs and items that may have been dropped by the lost party) or people. The handler will carefully consider the direction of the wind and they will generally search into the wind.

If you are going to use a dog to search an area do not have people stand up-wind and do not let people walk through the area first. The dog has the best chance of success in an uncontaminated area. Again they do not need scent articles. The dog will indicate to the handler on articles with human scent on them and will indicate at a person, whether conscious or unconscious.

The dog will be able to search reasonably large areas very quickly.

### Avalanche Searches

Many Police Dogs are also trained to search for buried people in the case of an avalanche. Where a person's best chance of survival is in the first 15 minutes it is important to get the dog team into the area as soon as possible. They can search in snow very efficiently and can search an area about the size of a football field in a matter of a few minutes as compared to a probe search, which would take hours.

When searching in avalanche situations always consider using the dogs, even when searchers have already been through the area with probes. The pocket of scent coming up through the snow from a body is still easily detectable to a dog and people walking through the snow has little effect on the dog's ability to search.

When using the dog always have diggers ready to dig where the handler indicates. The handler will indicate where to dig and then continue the search with the dog. He or she will not stop and help dig when there is more area to be searched.

Also of note is the fact that Police Dogs are capable of travelling in a variety of ways including helicopter (which includes winching), boats, vehicles and are capable of abseiling should the need arise. Ideally it is best to bring in the dog team to the area fresh rather than have them hike in for hours prior to starting a task.

## **Tasking a Handler**

Dog teams are trained to be proficient in the bush and other areas. However when tasking a dog team in the field, ensure that they are accompanied by a SAR member to operate the radio and a SAR member to do the map work. The handler needs to completely focus on the dog and so can get out of touch with their exact position.

**Robbie Okeefe**  
SAR OC Taranaki

## **National Search and Rescue Committee meeting news.**

NZLSAR is a member of the National Search and Rescue Committee which is made up of representatives from Maritime Safety, Civil Aviation, Police, Ministry of Defence, Aviation Industry Association, Shipping Federation and volunteer groups such as AREC and NZLSAR. I attended the National SAR Committee meeting held on 19 November 1999 on NZLSAR's behalf. Below are extracts of the unapproved minutes. They include information on the proposed satellite phase out timetable and its subsequent effect on ELT's.

### **NZLUT Upgrade**

Mr Bracefield briefed the Committee on the progress of the installation of the GEOLUT at Lower Hutt. It was planned to be commissioned and in operation by the end of January 2000. Delay in commissioning being to wait for the passing of Y2K. The full benefit of the system cannot be utilised until operators ensure that they are carrying a 406 MHz ELT. Captain Good stated that the NZDF, specifically Navy and Air, will check on the progress of 406 MHz ELT installation.

### **Proposed New Zealand SAR Award**

Senior Sergeant Prins spoke to the proposal for a NZ SAR award that would recognise excellence for performance or contribution to SAR. The matter was discussed and garnered healthy support from the Committee. It was decided that the award would be open to Class I, II and III and would be a good way of raising the profile of SAR in NZ. Mr Bracefield and Police will develop the

idea further and recommendations will be passed to the Committee. To enable a decision to be made on the award before next year's meeting it is intended that the Committee will circulate out of session to discuss the issues of wording, type, funding, timeline, key dates, political backing, etc.

### **Key Items from COSPAS-SARSAT Council Meeting, London**

Mr Bracefield spoke to a number of issues that arose included:-

- a. The intent to phase out the 121.5/243.0 monitoring facility of the present 8 satellites by 2008. The actual turn off date is in dispute, as some countries want 121.5 retained.
- b. ICAO to require all new aircraft to be fitted with 406 MHz ELT from 2002.
- c. All International aircraft to be fitted with 406 MHz ELT by 2005.
- d. No new satellites will be launched with the 121.5/243.0 monitoring facility.
- e. The status quo will remain until the present 8 satellites expire or the processing capability runs out. Currently there are only four satellites monitoring 121.5/243.0. The loss of any of these four will lead to increased monitoring times between satellites and hence the functionality of the system will be severely reduced come 2008.

f. The FAA has instructed all US manufacturers to cease production of 121.5/243.0 beacons from 2004.

g. There is concern in the case of NZ for a single database for 406 MHz registered beacons. At present they can be registered with the NRCC or Maritime. Mr Bracefield stated that the database needed to be held at the NRCC and they were working through this issue with Maritime.

h. There is confusion in the industry as to 406 MHz beacon coding. COSPAS-SARSAT Council has recently published the reference document for beacon coding and measures are underway to ensure that the information is getting to the right people.

i. There are many problems at the moment with 406 MHz beacons changing hands and the industry requires some form of regulation to ensure that the database is kept up to date.

### **Other Business**

Mr Bracefield briefed the committee of increasing concerns about the possibility of legal actions being taken against the NRCC in the event of unsuccessful SAR operations. It was stated that the NRCC had limited indemnity of \$20 million and each of the staff has a limited liability cover of up to \$500,000.

**John P Tristram**

National Field Officer

## **Police Report**

John Tristram and I have been busy trying to get around the country to see the different SAR groups. We have attended the Christchurch and Timaru SAREX's, as well as meetings at Mt Cook, Whangarei, Palmerston North, Wanganui and Rotorua.

I have also attended the Australian Disaster Victim Identification (DVI) conference in Melbourne. The conference covered various issues related to SAR. Best practice internationally has shown the importance of using volunteers in recovery of remains. DVI is covered later in this report.

### **Debrief**

When running a debrief in relation to any search you are involved with can you please ensure a copy of any debrief notes are sent to me. I use them to see if there is any trend emerging or if any changes are required to the procedures nationally. An example is the debrief for a plane ditching off the Canterbury Coast in November. As a result of the debrief, changes have been made to the Master Operating Procedures (MSOP) for the Communications Centre.

### **Air patrols**

The Coastguard have a series of air patrols around the country. They are available for any marine and coastline SAR. They have trained pilots and observers. Please ensure they are used whenever possible.

### **Christchurch trialing CD format for mapping**

Peter Summerfield is trialing a new CD Rom programme for mapping over the next three months in conjunction with LINZ. If successful, the new format will enable search planning to be streamlined.

### **Search Dogs**

I had a meeting with the Police Dog section and we have reached agreement on the assessment regime for Civilian SAR dogs. Draft guidelines have been developed and circulated to the Specialist Sub Committee. The moratorium as suggested by Peter Cameron NZLSAR Specialist Subcommittee Chairman to assess no more dogs and handlers until standards have been developed has been agreed to by the dog section. I will advise District SAR Coordinators.

### **RNZAF Support**

Due to commitments, such as East Timor the RNZAF requested to pull out of the Timaru and Nelson SAREX's. However following representation this was rescinded and the exercises were held with the RNZAF support.

**NRCC** held a workshop for its SARMC's at the police college 28 – 30 January 2000. Police members and air advisers from West Coast, Te Anau, and Invercargill attended. Planning and post airfield crashes were discussed. Greater cooperation was

promised by the NRCC in dealing with beacon activation's and aircraft incidents.

## **DVI**

At the Australian DVI conference one of the incidents covered was the Swiss Air Flight 111 crash in 1998. The aircraft crashed into the sea near Peggy's Cove, Nova Scotia. The incident highlighted the importance of volunteers in aircraft crash. A relevant statistic is 282 kilometres of shoreline searched by volunteers and police over 60 consecutive days by using a total of 1000 persons totaling 48,000 hours. Cost for meals for this was \$300,000.

Some other statistics from the operation are:

- Importance of only having one media centre and trained persons who make media releases, including reading from prepared scripts
- Within several days there were 1500 media and 3000 family members present.
- Relatives of victims have formed a company to take on the Government and Swiss Air over the disaster. Lawsuits totalling 64 billion are outstanding.
- The media hired all resources including all rental vehicles within hours of the crash.
- Canada was able to put in resources that we lack (the air crash occurred 30 kilometres from an airforce base which had 40 helicopters and 60 fixed wing aircraft).
- The crashed aircraft had to be reconstructed to identify the cause. 98% of the aircraft was recovered.
- 200 deep sea divers were used during the recovery.
- Heavy lifting vessels were left on the scene for six months.
- A vacuum dredge at \$2 million per day was used for seven days to locate debris etc.
- The disaster room at the local RCMP had been used as storage with outdated computers, etc, prior to the incident. Since then all disaster rooms throughout Canada have been upgraded.
- The crime scene area was 50 square nautical miles.
- Repatriation of human remains took 111 days.
- 55% of body mass in 3000 pieces were recovered.
- 4300 photos taken
- 1227 DNA tests were completed

- A Supreme Court Judge was used to decide what to do with the unidentifiable human remains.
- It took three week for Swiss Air to finalise the passenger manifest.

This tragedy was an exception, however it shows what could happen. It also illustrates what may be needed from NZLSAR should a similar disaster ever happen in New Zealand.

## **Library**

A further meeting has been held with the head librarian at the Police College. They will now start to collate the publications currently held by NZLSAR and this office. They will then be put into a library format, book index prepared, and then be made available for lending to NZLSAR and Police SAR members. The books will be placed on the National collection, but released for loaning by the National Field Office or myself.

Books will be released on loan for four weeks only. Failure to return will result in the Police library sending a "hurry up" letter to the lendeer.

## **National SAR Award**

Following support from SAR organisations, a new award for persons involved in SAR has been created. This award should be seen as the next level above any current internal SAR awards. It will be awarded by the National SAR Committee annually (membership includes NZ Police, NZLSAR, Coastguard, RCC, Defence Forces, AREC etc).

The criteria includes:-

- This prestigious award is in recognition of an 'Outstanding contribution to search and rescue' within the New Zealand region.
- It is awarded annually at the National Search and Rescue Committee meeting.
- The award is open to any individual or organisation and may relate to a particular event or a sustained contribution over a period of time.
- The successful nominee will have made a significant contribution to New Zealand's Search and Rescue ability or to the saving of human life.

It is based on the Australian award.

### **ACC and Police**

At the Palmerston North region meeting a presentation was made by an officer from the ACC. The presentation covered various points, but of interest was the lack of cover for the first week should any person be injured. ACC will not pay the first weeks wages and then only 80% thereafter if a person is injured and unable to work.

Person who attend SAREX's and official exercises are covered by General Instruction S386 which allows for persons who are injured to receive a top up from the Police should their employer refuse to provide

cover. This also highlights an area of concern as several areas run training under the auspices of NZLSAR, with no Police input. If a person is injured at one of these training sessions then there may be no cover under S386.

This can be avoided by ensuring that your District or Local SAR Coordinator is advised of any training and asked to put it on the training calendar and local SAR Police invited to attend.

### **Gerard Prins**

Police SAR Coordinator

## **Training Subcommittee Report**

The November to March period tends to be a relatively quiet time for the Training Subcommittee and the past few months have been no exception. However, the Subcommittee did meet on Sunday, 12 March after having spent the Saturday observing the Canterbury SAREX at Lake Lyndon. Members of the Subcommittee participated in the training modules that were run on Saturday.

Two new members have joined the committee, **Peter Cameron** from Christchurch, as Chairman of the Specialist Subcommittee, and **Laurie Gallagher** from Wellington.

### **Standards:**

#### **Field Controller Standards**

A Field Controller Standards workshop was held in Whangarei in March. Further workshops are planned for the Waikato and possibly the South Island later this financial year.

#### **Rescue Controller Standards:**

The Draft Standards were issued in November last year for general comment and feedback. To date there has been virtually no feedback. Taking this as a positive response, the Standards were approved by the Training Subcommittee at its March meeting and have now been submitted to the National Committee for final approval and endorsement by NZLSAR.

### **SAR Communication Manager Standards;**

The second draft has been reviewed and we are now waiting for the third draft to be published before the Standards are issued for general comment and review.

### **Publications:**

#### **Work Book:**

The Workbook has been published and has been distributed to SAR groups around the country.

#### **Cave SAR Handbook:**

Some further work has been done on the second draft.

### **Training**

#### **Regional Training Grants**

The Training Subcommittee reviewed the requests from regions for additional grants and a recommendation was submitted to the National Committee for consideration at its November meeting. This resulted in the training grant allocation being increased to \$52,000 for this financial year.

### **EML Courses**

Ross Gordon of EML continues to run training courses for SAR personnel. Since the report to the November meeting the following courses have been run:

Introductory TCA	1
Search Methods	3
Managing Search Operations1	

There have been no TCA Stage 2, Urban Search, or Team Leaders Courses run

In addition Dunedin ran another two successful one-day update sessions, one on TCA and one on Search Methods. Unfortunately two courses were cancelled at very late notice. We must impress on the Regional Committees the importance of either running the courses they have booked or giving adequate notice of cancellation. Unfortunately in both of these cases the notice was too short to enable another Region to pick up the weekend. Currently EML has all weekends booked to the end of the financial year. A schedule of the EML courses will be put on the web site.

### **Police SAR Controllers Course**

The Police are running two SAR Controllers courses (one already held in March) and in August of this calendar year. These are two-week courses, being a week each on land and marine SAR. Skip Stoffel of ERI and Ross Gordon of EML run the land SAR section of the course. The Police have kindly offered NZ Land SAR one place on the land segment of each course. I attended the March course. A decision has yet to be made on who will be attending the August course. Discussions have commenced with EML to explore the possibility of running a similar week-long course for volunteers. This would, of course, require the participants to take some time of work to attend for the five days.

### **Training Modules**

NZLSAR has access to the one day Search Management for Team Leaders using the Canadian SPECTRA package. A couple of pilot training workshops will be run (one in each island) to introduce people to this course. Hopefully this will lead to people picking up the course and running it in their local area.

The Canterbury Observation Course for SAR team members is to be packaged for use around the country.

A training module on boot print observation and identification is in the process of being packaged for use around the country.

A module is also being developed, based on the Canterbury Harris Trophy SAR Competition, to encourage practicable applications of the training that is being done around the country.

### **Other matters**

A number of issues have been discussed at Training Subcommittee meetings, some of which form part of the input to the MoU that is currently being developed with the Police. These include;

**Affiliation** - A further discussion paper has been circulated for comment. We need to promote affiliation from the point of view that "affiliation to NZLSAR results in a benefit to the SAR organisation as a whole" rather than the benefit to individual SAR groups. In time there will be a resultant flow on of significant benefits to the local SAR organisations.

**Regions** - Some consensus needs to be achieved on the titles for the seven regions.

**Appointment of Advisers** - A paper on the appointment of Advisers has been circulated to the Committee and a copy is available for any other person interested. Some feed back on the second draft of the discussion paper would be appreciated.

### **Roscoe Tait**

Chairman Training Subcommittee

## **MSO week Course**

NZLSAR is proposing to fund up to 18 Advisers to the two, one week long MSO Courses, one to be run from 14 to the 18 August. The second will run from 28 August to 1 September. It is envisaged that each course will have on it nine Police and nine NZLSAR members. While NZLSAR and Police will be able to pick up transport and accommodation costs, attendees will need to arrange their own leave. Applications are invited from Land SAR Advisers and should be to this office by **Friday, 19 May 2000**.

NZLSAR intends to use the College for the weekend 19 and 20 August (the weekend between the two courses) by holding its Committee meeting and Annual General Meeting there on Saturday and some form of Conference on Sunday. Course attendees at the first course will be free to stay over and attend these two functions. Accommodation costs for the weekend are still being considered.

**Editors Comments** To a big thank you to **Robbie, Gerry and Roscoe** for your articles. To those who proof read and check the spelling and grammar, thank you also. Copy for the **June News** is most welcome and the close-off date is **Friday 26 May 2000**. A plea for more material as this is very much "your newsletter". Articles on gear, SAR training or operations are most welcome. Please either mail as neatly hand-written, printed hard copy or on a disc to **NZLSAR, PO Box 12081, Thorndon, Wellington**. Alternatively email it to **tristram.nzlsar@xtra.co.nz** Even if you have some thoughts on an article but are diffident in putting pen to paper, feel free to give me a ring on **04-470-7247** and we can talk it through. Regards **John P Tristram**, National Field Officer