

WINTER 2017: Otago Callout Squad



SURF LIFE SAVING
NEW ZEALAND



RESCUE OF THE MONTH

RECOGNISING OUTSTANDING RESCUES

NATIONAL WINNER

In it for life

Date: July 21, 2017

Location: Taieri Plains, Otago

Lifeguards involved: James Coombes, Isaac Davies, Matthew Bradley, Max Corboy, Alan Todd, Michael Trembath, Seth McPhee, Rhys McAlevey, Scott Weatherall, Stefan Brown

At around midnight on 21 July 2017, St. Clair and St. Kilda Surf Life Saving Club members responded to multiple 111 emergency calls for multiple people trapped on the roof of a four-wheel-drive vehicle in a river near Riverside Road in Mosgiel.

Seven club members responded with two IRBs and swift water rescue equipment. However, upon arrival the crew saw the patients were approximately 500 meters away and it was deemed too dangerous to access them from that point.

What is normally a small creek, was now a raging torrent with darkness adding to the complexity of the rescue. The lifeguards could see the patients waving a small torch, and who were also yelling for help but due to the rushing water, the would-be rescuers could not hear them.

An alternative launching point had to be chosen and subsequently, an alternative route planned for the rescue to be safe. However, due to localised flooding and poor road conditions including washed out sections, this was a 40 minute round trip with support from the Mosgiel Volunteer Fire Brigade.

During this trip it was also decided that a rescue helicopter would be required so two team members were dropped at the rescue helicopter hangar to provide air support.

Once at the new launching site, the team members assessed the situation to deploy but communications were challenging with minimal cellular and VHF radio communications making their rescue even harder.

By this point, the vehicle had been swept down the river and into a large stand of poplar trees and a fence, creating more complex and hazardous conditions for the IRB crew.

One of the IRBs was then launched with Isaac Davies (driver) and Matthew Bradley (crew) who proceeded to rescue the patients two at a time, while a second IRB remained on standby should it be required for backup. With the conditions worsening, one patient had to be towed away by James Coombes (rescue swimmer) against the current to the waiting IRB for rescue.

Remaining team members on shore assisted the patients who all required immediate attention to a waiting army unimog, where they were assessed by ambulance and rescue helicopter paramedics. All emergency services then had to quickly leave the area due to the rapidly rising floodwaters.

Every single victim was successfully rescued and returned to a place of safety, but without the direct intervention of the Otago IRB callout surf life savers and other emergency services, it is highly likely that these people would have drowned.