



2nd - RESCUE OF THE MONTH

Recognising Outstanding Rescues

DECEMBER: Whangamata SLSC



DATE: 20 November, 2019

LOCATION: Whenuakura Island, Whangamata

SURF LIFEGUARDS: Phoebe Havill, Callum Fulton, Andrew Earl-Peacock,
Andrew Hodgson

Local knowledge, skill and bravery helped lifeguards rescue a woman and her two daughters who were trapped inside Whangamata's Donut Island, and as a result, those lifeguards secured second in December's BP Rescue of the Month.

Whenuakura Island, known affectionately as Donut Island due to its ring of land surrounding a sunken pool of water in the centre with water flowing in through a surging sea cave. When conditions are calm it's a fun adventure, but when the surf gets rough it's dangerous.

On 20 November last year, a kayak rental company staff member realised three kayakers were overdue, which triggered the alarm to raise the Emergency Callout Squad, and four Whangamata Surf Life Saving Club lifeguards sprung into action; Phoebe Havill, Callum Fulton, and experienced IRB drivers Andrew Earl-Peacock and Andrew Hodgson.

After a quick planning session and gearing up, they set out in two IRBs. At the island, the tide was against them, and the sea surges were strong, breaking through the cave heavily and into the island's centre. Phoebe and Callum put on helmets, and took tubes and fins to swim through the cave. Inside, they found a woman and her two daughters. The lifeguards knew of a smaller side exit from the island that is usually more sheltered from the surges, and began preparing the trio for a rock rescue, to the IRBs.

Callum went with the first patient, coaching her on rock exits, then helping her jump off the rocks into the sea with the right timing amongst the surges, and helping her into the waiting IRB that was manoeuvred into position. But, after she was safely into the IRB, the conditions had shifted enough that Phoebe and Callum decided the side exit was no longer the safest way off the island. They would have to take the other two out through the main sea cave.

Phoebe and Callum briefed the remaining two people on the rescue, secured them in their rescue tubes, then towed them 50 metres through the surging cave entrance, out to the waiting IRBs, battling against the waves. Then they were whisked back to land, assessed, and were able to leave safe and well without any further treatment.

Without the right skilled people on hand, and the right rescue equipment, the trio would have faced waiting in unfriendly conditions until the swell died down before they could leave the island. In this case, the surf didn't drop until late in the evening. It was an extremely difficult situation, which they would not have been able to get out of without the assistance of the highly trained lifeguards. The location of the patients also meant they would not have been able to be seen without surf lifeguards swimming there.

Just three days beforehand, Phoebe was an instructor on the Zespri Eastern Region Intermediate Lifeguard School – where safe rock rescues were taught. Callum had been one of the students, and put his new skills to use in this rescue.



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