



RESCUE OF THE MONTH



CLUB: Otago Search and Rescue Team

SURF LIFEGUARDS: Cam Third, Max Corboy, Ossian Woods, Cam Burrow, Sam Todd, Isaac Davies, Felix Cook, Ant Jackson, Nic Brice

Darkness was falling on the 6th of March when members of the Surf Life Saving New Zealand (SLSNZ) Otago Search & Rescue (SAR) Team received a call from NZ Police. Two surfers were stranded on the rocks at Bird Island.

The team leapt into action. Within 15 minutes of the call, one inflatable rescue boat (IRB) was launched from St Kilda and a second from St Clair. A third crew responded by picking up a rescue water craft (RWC/jet ski).

With the light rapidly fading, safety and visibility were key. Surf Lifeguards kitted themselves out with strobe lights and personal locator beacons (PLBs), while a team back on shore at St Clair Surf Life Saving Club maintained communication with the two IRB crews.

The surf was over 1.5m high when the two IRB crews reached the island – dangerous conditions to navigate, particularly around rocks.

They devised a plan to send the first IRB to collect both surfers off the rocks and return them to Tomahawk Beach, while the second IRB would collect the two surfboards. This second step was important, because if members of the public spotted surfboards on the island they would likely ring emergency services once again.

The two surfers were extremely cold, but otherwise unharmed aside from some minor cuts and scratches.

As the two crews headed back to their respective clubs, they faced increasingly difficult conditions with messy surf reaching 2m. By this point, light had faded and the crews arrived to shore in near-complete darkness.

Given the cold and the difficult conditions this particular evening, it is likely the two surfers would have met a very different end if not for the quick and skilful actions of the Otago SAR team.

In it for life