



RESCUE OF THE MONTH



CLUB: Whangamata Surf Life Saving Club

SURF LIFEGUARDS: Matthew Millward, Brianna Norris, Tyler Ranger, Nick Wagstaff, Ben Goffin

Whenuakura Island (or Donut Island) is a popular destination for kayakers and paddleboarders visiting the Coromandel. Located approximately one kilometre from the shore, the island is a dormant volcano with its crater filled with water. Visitors enter the island by paddling through a cave but when conditions change, they can quickly get into trouble.

On the afternoon of the 3rd of January Lifeguards from Whangamata SLSC were alerted to some people trapped inside Whenuakura Island with large waves and rough sea conditions at the island, and strong onshore winds present.

Lifeguards launched the rescue watercraft (RWC) to confirm the location of people inside the island and check the conditions of the rescue. They arrived to see a man and woman inside of the cave waving a paddle in the air. Conditions were extremely rough with swells of up to 1.5 metres breaking through the entrance of the island and surges of over two metres washing up the rocks.

Matthew left the RWC to begin the swim into the island, after roughly seven minutes of battling the waves and large surges in the hole he reached the patients who were safe but extremely worried about their situation.

Matthew signalled for assistance and Tyler entered the water to assist with the rescue. First Matthew attempted to recover the patients' paddleboard and was met by Nick on the RWC who collected it from him.

Matthew and Tyler then briefed the IRB crew, Brianna and Ben, and Nick on the RWC with the plan to extract the patients via the side entrance to the island. Matthew and Tyler walked the patients to the rocks and were met with large surges of over two metres. Matthew entered the water and retrieved lifejackets from the IRB for the patients to wear.

The woman was extracted from the rocks and swum through the surges to the RWC where she was transported to the IRB. The man was then retrieved via a similar extraction process and taken by the RWC to the IRB. Both people were unharmed but extremely relieved when they reached safety on dry land.

The pair rescued were both weak swimmers and weren't wearing lifejackets, so the outcome may have been very different if not for the successful rescue carried out by the Whangamata Surf Lifeguards.