

# Exercise Evaluation Report

## 2020 NORTHLAND SAREX

**Location:** Waipu Caves Area - Northland

**Date:** 07/11/20

**Report version:** 1

**Evaluator(s):** *Kip Mandeno – IMT Evaluator*

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## **Executive Summary**

The regular Northland SAREX was held over the weekend of the 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> of November 2020 involving Police, Far North SAR and Northland SAR. Supported by the Rapid Relief Team for catering on Saturday.

This SAREX was organised by Local Poice SAR squad staff and staffed by both Police and LSAR Volunteers. The format was rogaine (multi activity based) on private farm land, patches of bush and in a small cave.

The initial exercise started Friday evening and carried on through Saturday concluding with a social evening and quiz session. Sunday was a range of activities to engage SAR personnel in different activities and focused on team building.

The objectives of the SAREX were well met and provided an enjoyable and safe SAREX.

## **1. Recommendations**

1. Continuation of SAREX activities that involve multi-agency and multi groups in the Northland area to grow capacity, resources and skills.
2. As well as local inputs to multi activity SAREXs look to national inputs as well to add value and reduce workload for organisers
3. Look at developing multi activity SAREXs that could include an IMT or hold separate IMTEX events to ensure development of operational leadership and competency
4. Develop skills in SAR personnel around quick planning skills for teams

## 2. Introduction

The Northland SAREX is an annual feature on their SAR calendar and has typically run traditional format SAREXs with a lost person party / search format.

The Northland SAREX is typically a well-supported and well-run event that has good volunteer engagement however numbers this year according to organisers were a bit lighter than normal. The format of this event was a Friday evening navigation to a camp for the night & Rogaine style programme scheduled over the course of Saturday so that given good planning, navigation and fitness they could complete the course in one day earning points.

The Northland teams operate in a wide range of SAR scenarios occurring in Bush & Coastal Environments along with small amounts of Cave and Karst terrain. This SAREX also had a number of newer SAR members and others who are often in IMT so focussed on providing an opportunity to refresh basic skills and introduce people to different environments and activities.

## 3. Background

### 3.1 Background to the Exercise

SAREXs have been conducted by Northland Police District to test and maintain readiness for SAR events that may occur in a wide range of terrain. As well as a complex variety of terrain the geographical spread of Northland also adds challenges to SAR responses in the area.

### 3.2 Dates, location, organising agency(s), key people

- **Date of Exercise**  
6/11/20
- **Location**
  - Waipu Caves - Northland
- **Exercise Director**
  - Shane Turner (NZ Police)
- **Exercise Field Team:**
  - Anne Wilde (Northland LSAR)
  - Shane Cleary (Northland LSAR)
  - Grant Conaghan (Northland LSAR)
  - Ian Mander (Cave SAR Auckland)
  - Ian Fox (Landowner & Facilitator)
  - Cindy Fox (Landowner & Facilitator)
  - Jade Fox (Patient)
  - Kev Crawford (NZ Police)
  - Sam Davidson (NZ Police)
  - Ian Ruddell (FN LSAR)

### 3.3 Participating organisations

- NZ Police
- LandSAR Groups, Northland, Far North
- Rapid Relief Team Maungaturoto
- St John
- Private Land owners, Gary Sands, Ian Fox, Doug Sutton, community of Waipu Caves Estate

### 3.4 Exercise aim

- To provide an equal training opportunity for all participants across a broad range of SAR related skills and activities. To build positive relationships between civilian search teams through teamwork and learning objectives

### 3.5 Exercise objectives

- To enhance the inter-group operating capabilities of civilian and Police SAR groups within the district and build positive relationships between the squads.
- To assess SAR field teams and identify gaps in basic SAR skills.
- To gauge a baseline for team performance and planning throughout the district

### 3.6 Exercise Scenarios

Several phases were set for the SAREX starting on Friday Night concluding on Sunday Morning. The set up kept the various groups to a reasonable and practicable size which meant team sizes were typical of a modern SAR team of around 3 people

The detail of each activity is enclosed in the attached document but were made up of;

- Night One – Navigation to a point with a code and reference this focused on night navigation and radio skills
- Day Two – Nine activities covering;
  - Skill activity in a small cave
  - Scene investigation at an LKP
  - Equipment Inspection
  - Team Cooperation Activity
  - Observation activity for clues
  - First Aid & Stretcher Carry
  - Terrain Observation skills
  - Camp Skills
- Night Two – Social evening
- Day Three – Learning workshops

No IMT was used in this SAREX however a communication base operated as SAR base for the purposes of team and activity tracking. This provided the radio skills component of the exercise.



## 4. Evaluation Methodology

### 4.1 The agreed outcomes of the evaluation activity

Carry out observation of the field activities over the course of the SAREX.

### 4.2 Evaluation scope

The evaluation of the SAREX was carried out in the field as all aspects were easy to travel between.

### 4.3 Aspects of the exercise observed, what was not observed

All aspects of the SAREX were observed during the course the SAREX excluding the Sunday workshops as these did not provide a fundamental function of the SAREX.

### 4.4 The process followed in preparing and submitting the report

Police SAR provided a comprehensive and detailed plan for the exercise and reviewing activities on the day against this document provided a clear and detailed assessment process. The size and location of the SAREX also provided an opportunity to talk to participants and planners throughout the weekend.

There was no need to follow up or carry out investigations outside of the SAREX.

## 5. Findings

The exercise achieved outcomes of the SAREX and all KPIs, thorough planning prior to the weekend meant events were in appropriate locations and at suitable distances to make the weekend achievable but not too easy. A key result of the design of the SAREX meant that all participants of the SAREX were engaged throughout the weekend. This is a challenge in all SAREXs and was well met by the modular design of the weekend.

The SAREX was well briefed at the start of the weekend with a bit of a staggered start due to late arrivals, key outcomes were presented for each phase of the SAREX. The safety plan was well briefed with good consistency each time.

The key field scenarios were well resourced with local people and were well briefed on their requirements and provided an interactive learning environment.

Throughout the Saturday constant hot debriefs were held with each group by individual facilitators. Field competency was generally good with consistent activities throughout the day by facilitators. Basic skills shown by field teams were at a level suitable for SAR with the ability to navigate with a GPS, plan routes and think on the go. Radio skills were generally OK but could be a skill training focus for local groups. This can cover a procedure to follow if the repeater fails which is a common occurrence and also a focus on modern forms of communication such as phones etc.

The various activities provided a wide range of SAR Skills with the “bombs away” activity the only non-SAR specific skill activity. This activity however required communication and teamwork which formed part of the objectives of the SAREX.

The cave activity was appropriate to the group and skill level and did not set out to train them in Cave SAR but to challenge them in an unfamiliar environment. Safety equipment was adequate for the short duration of this cave however it is recommended that helmets used are for outdoor activities with a chinstrap. This was not a significant risk on this programme but is also something to be aware of in future activities that require helmets as well.

The only activity that didn't seem to fit well with the teams was the pack inspection as it did not seem to have a core purpose to participants. This could have been fixed by making it an “out of the gate” activity to pass through before the rest of the field on the morning of day 2.

The other event noticed with SAR teams was a weakness in planning when at activities. This is not unusual in a rogain SAREX as it is often hard to get into the mode of a normal operational team. A training point for local teams could be to strengthen team skills with “30-second” planning sessions for SAR events like approaching a vehicle, stepping into a First Aid Scenario etc.

Minor events occurred during the weekend that are typical of SAREXs but were well managed at the time. The SAREX was very well resourced by Police with their community hub vehicle and 4-wheel drive off-road side by side vehicle. This vehicle provided a safe and suitable transport option for deploying persons into the field and would be an asset to any SAR team operating farm or forestry terrain. It was good to see the appropriate use of a quad bike in the SAREX with it only being used by one person at a time for minor support roles.

## 6. Conclusions

The SAREX was well run and well-coordinated by Police with a new programme and direction for them. They committed a lot of work into the programme which can be a challenge for anyone to put together.

A key outcome for the SAREX from talking to participants would be to continue to deliver this style of the programme as they enjoyed it more than a typical SAREX. This in itself can be a bit of risk for SAR groups as it does not total operational competency that comes from a typical format SAREX so adding in some IMT activities from time to time can aid in mitigating this risk.

With the increasing use of rogaine around the country, Northland could also use the opportunity to “tap” into a wider range of Rogaine programmes to make planning and deployment of these easier. Utilising Land SAR training as Taupo LSAR have done could bring in fresh ideas and experiences along with a reduced workload for local organisers.

## 7. Appendix

REFER: Planning documents attached



## 258 Report Form

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TEXT: Northland SAREX 2019  
Operation Hideaway Valley

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Kip MANDENO

This report relates to a rough outline for the Northland SAREX set down to run on the 6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> of November 2020.

This year's SAREX is based on the ROGAINE, (Rugged Outdoor Group Activity Involving Navigation and Endurance) style event.

This style of event was selected to provide a broader learning experience for all those involved. Participants will be mixed into teams to compete against each other while completing SAR related tasks within a set geographical area in a set time period. Some of the tasks will be compulsory while others will be optional allowing teams to gain maximum points. The event will require, teamwork, endurance, navigation and map reading/appreciation.

The exercise will involve Northland Police SAR, Whangarei and Far North LSAR groups, ST Johns SERT and Rapid Relief.

**PURPOSE:** To provide an equal training opportunity for all participants across a broad range of SAR related skills and activities. To build positive relationships between civilian search teams through teamwork and learning objectives

**BACKGROUND:** Waipu caves area is becoming a tourist hotspot with thousands visiting the Waipu tourist cave and popular day walks. Local farmers and landowners have had an influx of day trippers using the area for walking and caving and climbing and it is a high probability area to be involved in a cave rescue type job

**AREA OF OPERATION:** The area of operation will be three farms situated on Waipu Caves Road combined to give over a 100 hectares of useable land. The A/O is made up of an extensive cave system, large streams and flowing water, a reasonably large manmade lake, native bush, open pasture and would be considered undulating and physically demanding. There is a small amount of public access but the majority of the area is private property and the 3 owners have consented to the land being used for the purpose of this training exercise. I have conducted repeater checks and the area has excellent radio coverage once repeater is installed at high point.

**OVERVIEW:** The area of operation will be three farms situated on Waipu Caves Road combined to give over a 100 hectares of useable land. The area of operations is made up of an extensive cave system, large streams and flowing water, a reasonably large manmade lake, native bush, open pasture and would be considered undulating and physically demanding. There is a small amount of public access but the majority of the area is private property and the 3 owners have consented to the land being used for the purpose of this training exercise.

**OBJECTIVES:** The objectives of the SAREX are

- a) To enhance the inter-group operating capabilities of civilian and Police SAR groups within the district and build positive relationships between the squads.
- b) To assess SAR field teams and identify gaps in basic SAR skills.
- c) To gauge a baseline for team performance and planning throughout the district

Participants will be broken into teams of 4 to complete 3 phases.

**Phase 1** will see the teams leave the start on a Nav Course leading to an overnight camp. Once at camp the teams will be provided with a Rogaine Pack to plan for

**Phase 2** the next day. Teams will complete as many of the stations/learning objectives possible in set time frame and get to the finish line.

**Phase 3** will be completed the following day with 3 workshops to choose from consisting of Caving, Abseiling or Tyrolian Bridge building.

**Night 1 Overnight in field:** Participants will be directed to leave from HQ on a set Nav Course which will lead them to a set destination in the valley where they will spend the night using their SAR gear. All participants will be in position by 2200hr to ensure a reasonable rest period. The set destination will allow all participants be in the same area. Upon arrival Teams will be presented with a pack containing a topographical map and 9 grid references. Each reference will indicate a learning objective and the purpose will be for teams to achieve as many as possible in a set time and get to the HQ on or before the cut off time.

**Day 2: Rogaine:** At 0730hr participants can begin the next phase and attend the reference points they have indicated according to the route they planned. Any team can decline any learning objective if they feel they cannot complete it and want to proceed on but cannot return to it. Only one team can participate in each learning objective at a time so other teams can opt to wait or proceed on. If proceeding on because of double book then they can return.

## **REFERENCE POINTS**

**1 Caving *aka Down and Dirty:*** enter Bridge cave and proceed to the end where they will receive a code. The cave will be lit with glow sticks and there are no decision points. The cave has no water and has some low crawls but no squeezes and although presents obvious risks these can be mitigated with risk planning and common sense. This could challenge some participants but is very achievable and is nothing more than a confidence booster.

**2 3D observation line *aka Look and Sea:*** Participants will be given a set amount of time to walk a bolder pile on a set route looking for manmade items

and reporting back. The point of difference will be that the team can look from different angles and heights. The rock pile will present minimal risks and participants will be briefed on personal safety and care when standing on them. Points will be given for the correct items

3 **First Aid *Broken but not out***: Participants will be given a set time to locate and assess patient (Baselines) and then provide the required medical treatment that feel is required. I plan to have the learning objective run by SERT staff member who can provide a quick overview to highlight the positives and correct any issues they identify as well as access the station.

4 **Stretcher carry *aka Highs and Lows***: Participants will need to locate a cabin where they will find a patient that requires a stretcher carry. Teams will be given a G/R to a high point for a helicopter extraction and will have a time frame to get there. The teams will be marked on their team work, planning, navigation, safety considerations and patient welfare. There is no first aid requirement

5 **Build a fire and cook an egg *aka Heat and Eat***: Participants will be given 30 minutes to light a fire and cook an egg. An array of items and materials (no matches or lighters) will be available to be used in any combination by the teams

6 **Distance estimation *aka Can you see me***: This will be manned by SAR communications. Teams will head to the high point in the area and directions will be waiting. They will be required to locate and shoot a compass bearing to known landmarks and then estimate distance then using a bearing head on foot to one of the locations. This will be challenging and considered an endurance and navigation exercise. The landmarks are in open ground with low vegetation. They will require some route planning to get there in good time. Teams can opt to refrain from this endurance feat at a cost to points gained and move to next objective.



**7 Pack Inspection** *aka Plan to be prepared*: Teams will have a list of equipment to carry for the duration of the event. Teams will be checked to ensure the list of equipment is adhered to. This will be a mandatory checkpoint for all teams

**8 Team Building** *aka \_\_\_\_\_*: A team type thinking challenge to challenge teamwork TBA

**9 Scene investigation** *aka Elementary my dear Watson*: Participants will be given a scene to investigate. They will be given a set time to search and collate as much information they can about the people that were there and report back. Points will be given for detail and search techniques.

**Hazards**: Risk assessments will need to be completed for tasks however a lot will be mitigated with common sense. The exercise can be run effectively without staff having to enter dense bush and the water flow could be considered hazardous but can be easily mitigated if participants treat it with the respect it deserves.

**Social evening**: After the Rogaine is completed and teams set up sleeping arrangements and will have a social evening involving a prize giving and quiz night. Rapid Relief have jumped at the opportunity to attend and cater the night time meal for all.

## **Day 2**

**Interactive Learning workshop**: Participants will choose one of 3 learning workshops which will be held onsite. These will run for roughly 3 hours and include a learning objective followed by a practical exercise.

### **Options**

**1 Abseiling**: A quick look at rope techniques, basic rope skills/knots, equipment and safety gear. The practical will be a 40-50m abseil into tourist cave. Some discussion will need to be had with qualified experts running the workshop around limited spaces to ensure there is time to complete the practical.

**2 Caving:** A quick look at caving skills, cave navigation and risks, gear and equipment and safety skills. The practical will be entering the cave through escape route into Two Tone system and out through Daylight Duck. The cave will take about 1 hour to complete and although will be challenging to some does not have any abseils or squeezes.

Wetsuits and overalls are required as well as other safety gear so there may also be a limited number of participants as outlined after discussion with experts.

**3 Tyrolian Bridge:** Teaches rope skills and the safe construction of a Tyrolian bridge, how it could be used safety tests. Practical will involve the team testing and using the equipment to cross the hazard safely.

A HQ will be set up at the SUTTON farm and will include the radio communication station. A HQ team will be utilised to ensure smooth running of the Rogaine event. The HQ has power, cell phone coverage and toilet facilities. I have been in discussion with Ben from Rapid relief to sort catering the event and this is still ongoing.

Both LSAR squads have been advised of the dates and will be attending but I have not had confirmed numbers as yet.

The learning objectives have been set at a basic SAR skill level to allow the focus to be on team bonding and planning.

For your information and noting please.



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