

# Exercise Evaluation Report

## Operation Donovan

**Location:** Karakariki Valley Recreational Area , Whatawhata , Waikato

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**Report version:** Final

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## **Executive Summary**

The Waikato Police District SAREX 2019, Operation Donovan, was held in the Karakariki Recreational Area, Whatawhata, Waikato, on Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> and Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> March 2019.

All objectives were met to an acceptable level.

Personnel and procedures across Police and LandSAR were tested on a number of dimensions - electronic, technique and environment. Valuable learnings were gained.

A number of opportunities to fine tune IMT activity have been identified and detailed in recommendations.

# 1. Recommendations

All Objectives were met. There are however opportunities for “fine-tuning”.

- 1) IMT members consider and practice procedures which, both complement SARTrack and assist with a swifter deployment of SAR Teams.
- 2) IMT members are alerted to the Canyoning Pre-plan when developing an effective SAR Op for a Canyoning incident.
- 3) Incident Management Team members refresh their knowledge of the functions of each position within the IMT.
- 4) Incident Management Team members are provided with more opportunities to work with SARTrack .
- 5) Incident Management Team members, remain aware that SARTrack, is just one of the options they have in their tool-box when managing a SAROP
- 6) The Waikato Police District SAR Coordinator ensures other Police SAR Coordinators are aware of the emerging popularity of Canyoning as an outdoor pursuit and the existence of the website - [nzcayoningassociation.org](http://nzcayoningassociation.org) – as a source of assistance in mounting an effective SAROP.

## 2. Introduction

Every year , the New Zealand Police is required to exercise with Partner Agencies in the Search and Rescue (SAR) Environment. This includes Land and Marine environments.

The Waikato Police District SAR Coordinator, has the lead for the conduct of matters SAR, on behalf of the Waikato Police District.

This position also has the responsibility for the command, coordination and training of the Waikato Police District SAR Squad.

The Waikato Police District SAR Squad also works very closely with the various NZ LandSAR teams throughout the District.

Canyoning, is a recreational sport, experiencing a rapid rise in popularity in New Zealand.

The Waikato Police District has many opportunities, for participants to engage in this activity. The behavioural aspects of participants and the dynamics of the activity, are not widely known.

The selection of the Karakariki Valley Recreational Area gave Waikato Police District SAR Squad and the NZ LandSAR search volunteers, the opportunity to exercise the traditional disciplines , one could expect to apply during a search.

Two recently placed, transportable homes , in a paddock , relatively close to the search area, were secured as a Search Base. Whilst these buildings provided shelter they were somewhat spartan and provided a true test of the Incident Management Team's ability to think laterally and set up an effective search and rescue operation.

There was a strong representation from Police SAR members and a broad representation from Land SAR members from across the district.

## 3. Background

### 3.1 Background to the Exercise

Canyoning, is a recreational sport, experiencing a rapid rise in popularity in New Zealand. The Waikato Police District has many opportunities, for participants to engage in this activity. The behavioural aspects of participants or the dynamics of the activity, are not widely known.

The selection of the Karakariki Valley Recreational Area gave Waikato Police District SAR Squad and the NZ LandSAR search volunteers, the opportunity to exercise the traditional disciplines, one could expect to apply during a search.

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

Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> March & Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> March 2019

Karakariki Valley Recreational Area, Whatawhata, Waikato

NZ Police ( Waikato District SAR) Sergeant Brendan Robertson, Paeroa

NZ LandSAR (Hamilton) Kip Mandeno and Matt Hassard

### 3.3 Participating organisations

NZ Police – members of the Waikato Police District SAR Squad

NZ LandSAR – members from across the Waikato region

### 3.4 Exercise aim

Incident Management Team members to conduct Extended Search Planning techniques for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Operational Period and Field Teams to safely conduct off track SAR taskings

### 3.5 Exercise objectives

#### **IMT**

1. Review the 1<sup>st</sup> operational period file. Whiteboard information and timelines.
2. Complete extended Search Planning to include scenario analysis/weighting/ segmenting and prioritising search areas and appropriate tasking of Field Teams.
3. Conduct additional investigation as appropriate.
4. To safely deploy, manage and recover field teams conducting a search and rescue exercise in difficult terrain.
5. Provide effective communications in the search area.
6. Complete a handover.

#### **Field Teams:**

1. Sign cut DP's, huts, tracks and travel routes and follow any sign located.
2. Navigate and conduct search techniques in difficult terrain, vegetation and river crossings.
3. Communicate effectively with the IMT.

### 3.6 Exercise Scenario

The participants were entering the exercise as if it was the second operational period of an actual search.

On Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> March 2019 , 4 persons (male /mid-twenties) had entered the Karakariki Recreational Area with the intention of prospecting for canyoning opportunities. They were due back on Thursday night.

On Friday 15<sup>th</sup> March 2019, 2115hrs, the father of one of the canyoning enthusiasts, reported his son overdue. The son was usually reliable . The group had not expected to be out overnight and was believed to be lightly equipped .

Initial action on the Friday night included raising a small Incident Management Team (IMT) and inserting a small LandSAR Team including a Search Dog into the area. (Day 1, 1<sup>st</sup> Op Period)

Taskings of this team included sign cutting the area of the missing persons car and searching the Karakariki Track to an area of interest heading off the track towards the upper Karakariki Catchment.

By the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> operational period , the area of the missing persons vehicle had been examined. A possible direction of travel (DOT) into the upper Karakariki Valley had been detected but it was described as vague, the area being heavily contaminated. The search dog had indicated on an area on the upper end of the short track up the valley near the farm boundary. This was also described as vague and inconclusive. This was not pursued as the dog had injured itself.

The IMT completed written taskings, in preparation for a Search Operation to be undertaken on Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> March 2019. (Day 2, 2<sup>nd</sup> Op Period)

## 4. Evaluation Methodology

### 4.1 The agreed outcomes of the evaluation activity

A forthright report outlining observations of the Land SAREX's, (Operation Donovan) relationship to stated objectives, with particular focus on the conduct / procedures of the Incident Management Team (IMT).

### 4.2 Evaluation scope

Assess Interagency relationships.

Identify strengths and limitations within current Standard Operating Procedures.

Identify strengths and limitations in personnel training.

Recommend improvements and strategies for future implementation.

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

#### Observed:

SAREX management and coordination

VHF radio communications

Local area knowledge and subject matter expertise

#### Not Observed:

In Field activity – monitored remotely via Radio and SarTrack

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

There was no interaction with the Exercise planners (*scenario*) prior to the SAREX.

The details of the SAREX and the location were forwarded the week previous to the SAREX.

It was agreed the evaluator would focus on the objectives , observe the SAREX activity and submit an evaluation report accordingly.

Activity from the evaluator during the SAREX included;

- Observe SAREX IMT activity and conduct.
- Attend IMT Hot debrief
- Attend the whole of SAREX debrief.

### 4.5 Other information

Activity not observed detailed above.



## 5. Findings

*Review the 1<sup>st</sup> Operational Period file. Whiteboard information and timelines.*

This was an activity that was conducted once the Field Teams had been dispatched with their preformatted taskings prepared by the Exercise planners. Once teams were in the field more detailed examination of taskings began .

*Complete extended Search Planning to include scenario analysis / weighting / segmenting / prioritising search areas and appropriate tasking of Field Teams.*

IMT members (Day 2, 2<sup>nd</sup> Op period) completed this objective , heavily influenced by clues being found by field team members . Deliberations were also influenced by information gained from an associate of one of the lost party (identified via Facebook). Lost Person Behaviour information was scarce on the activity of “Canyoning”. There was a variance of opinion on whether to go with a “Water” activity, “Hiker” activity or a blend of both.

IMT members (Day 2, 3<sup>rd</sup> Op period) also completed this objective , further they caught up on IMP housekeeping, ie, displaying the Missing Party profiles and a visual Timeline. However their challenge was the reporting of clues which had reduced to a trickle, they received some stimulation late in the operational period when one of the lost parties walked into a search team’s campsite. Appropriate discussions were had regarding advising NOK of developments and the consideration of a Media release. The IMT members, collectively decided to delay issuing any further taskings given that search team members, including themselves had been active for in excess of 13 hours and in some cases well in excess of 13 hours. Safety was a major consideration in this decision.

The delay in information being gleaned from the “Missing Party” was also a factor. Accordingly IMT activity ceased at about 2045hrs. Field Teams had been stood down at 1900hrs , with a directive to turn radios off at 2000hrs and be ready to receive a tasking at 0700hrs the following morning.

Overnight, 5 members of Police were pulled from the exercise and redeployed to Christchurch. The remaining Police member, presented to the Search HQ , (Day 3, 4<sup>th</sup> Op period) to find he had become the Incident Controller. The IMT quickly formed into the relevant roles and realized the folly of not completing the Incident Action plan the night before. To their credit, their approach started from scratch , ie , as if they were starting off the search. Taskings were established and issued with a sense of urgency. A formalised search urgency activity was undertaken and committed to paper ( previously it had only been spoken about) and a critical analysis of previous activity was undertaken – this highlighted a previous procedural error which had in turn caused a gap in the planning – previous IMT’s had been referring to several A3 laminated maps along with the SarTRACK electronic tracking. One map was also being used as a pin board, to track teams. The IMT would have benefitted from one Topo Map being the prime planning document , with the overlays of each operational period attached.

*Conduct additional investigation as appropriate.*

IMT members , regularly consulted with NOK and other people they considered could add value to their deliberations. In the main the exercise planners , hovering on the fringe of the exercise played these parts. A field team also happened upon a Pig Hunter. The team spoke with this person and reported his observations. The Incident Controller requested this person report to the IMT which duly happened. A more in depth interviewed of this person followed. A self-initiated intel gathering exercise on Facebook identified a friend of one member of the lost party. This person was contacted and asked for an opinion. He was unaware of the exercise and proffered the opinion that the missing party would unlikely be in the search area looking for canyoning opportunities – this , along with the Pig Hunters observations, tempered the IMT’s (Day2, 2<sup>nd</sup> Op period) perception of the urgency of the search.

*To safely deploy, manage and recover field teams conducting a search and rescue exercise in difficult terrain.*

Safety was a prominent component of the exercise at every level. Exercise planners emphasised their expectations throughout the SAREX. The appointed Safety Officer delivered a comprehensive safety brief in a vernacular which left those assembled, in no doubt about the importance of safety and the identified risks of the area.

One search team reported shots being fired. Whilst the shots were in a direction away from their intended route they called it in anyway. The IMT then considered the information, assessed the risk and authorised the team to continue.

Later, another team reported shots along with clues on the ground (tracks) that indicated the hunting activity was ahead of them. They considered it too dangerous to continue, which the IMT agreed with and promptly redeployed them. The IMT also considered the risk to other teams at the same time.

In the main Search Teams were well managed. SARTrack was used to good effect recording the arrival of searchers to the Search HQ. A good GSMEAC was delivered. Initial deployment could have been expediated by a white board or T-CARD system display of Team members. This would have complemented SARTrack, enabled those assembled to make better use of their time, prior to the briefing for example familiarising themselves with one another and sorting kit. Post deployment there were at times, periods of waiting in the field, for further tasking instructions from the IMT, this aspect highlighted some confusion as to which function had the responsibility of generating Taskings, some had been created by Planning & Intell, some had been created by Ops.(Day2 2<sup>nd</sup> Op period). A valuable robust discussion ensued.

*Provide effective communications in the search area.*

Effective, efficient and professional communications were provided. The Communications Manager recognised early the likelihood of the need for a repeater, appropriate arrangements were made for its placement. It was pleasing to see the taskings being generated electronically by the IMT, forwarded to the Radio operator, dispatched to the SAR teams and the reply or communications from the SAR Teams travelling the same path in reverse. In the interests of expediency, the IMT regressed from this practice on Sunday at the beginning of Day3 Op period 4, broadcasting a block of taskings. These taskings were later back captured in SARTrack.

*Complete a handover.*

A robust handover was completed at 1604hrs on Saturday (Day 2, 2<sup>nd</sup> Op period). Essentially IMT members swapped around within themselves and assumed new roles. Due to the forthright nature of the handover the new IMT was able to modify previous activity and make better use of whiteboards, ie, display Timeline and Missing Party profiles.

*Field Teams;*

*Sign cut DP's, huts, tracks and travel routes and follow any sign located.*

*Navigate and conduct search techniques in difficult terrain, vegetation and river crossings.*

*Communicate effectively with the IMT.*

These objectives were observed electronically, by virtue of the Radio and SARTrack. The population of the clue board was clear evidence of the success of sign cutting and the subsequent following of that sign.

There were some issues with navigation. Several teams became disorientated with the printed laminated maps provided. The confusion arose because they had been printed in "Portrait" with the map legend across the bottom. Grid references were given in reverse creating some angst with the IMT until the problem was relatively quick identified and solved.

This issue was discussed in the SAREX debrief with some useful "101" Map Reading tips given.

The greatest issue for the Search Teams was the rapid degeneration of clues left by the Missing Party, due to the very dry terrain and heat quickly evaporating wet footprints. This proved to be a valuable learning for team members.

## 6. Conclusions

*Review the 1<sup>st</sup> Operational period file. Whiteboard information and time lines:*

This objective was met. Whiteboard information from the 1<sup>st</sup> Operational period was scant and the timeline only existed electronically. An effort to improve upon this at an earlier stage would have been beneficial to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Operational incoming IMT and added to the professional image of the IMT.

*Complete Extended Search Planning to include scenario analysis / weighting / segmenting / prioritising search areas and appropriate tasking of Field Teams.*

This objective was met. Each IMT engaged in these aspects of extended search planning. There was a noticeable improvement each time the IMT went through the exercise. It would have been beneficial if the first IMT had started off on a full size TOPO Map, with this map becoming the single source of truth as the SAREX progressed. Consulting with three different maps – one small laminated map to plan on, one small map on the wall with pins indicating the Team locations and the map generated electronically proved to be hazardous.

Some critical analysis, early on, by the Day Three 4<sup>th</sup> Operational period IMT, highlighted a gap in the planning which would have been avoided had a bigger map being used as described.

During Day Two, 2<sup>nd</sup> Operational period, it became apparent some confusion existed as to whose responsibility for the generation of Taskings. After some robust discussion it was agreed this was a function of Ops. This is consistent with best practise.

*Conduct additional investigation as appropriate.*

This objective was met. Regular efforts were made to contact people you could reasonably expect to have information or give advice. This included the recovery of a Pig Hunter back to the search base for a more in depth interview on what he had seen.

Whilst the initiative to explore Facebook, to locate associates of the missing party and seek information on their activity was admirable. A more valuable exercise would have been seeking some guidance from the [nzcayoningassociation.org](http://nzcayoningassociation.org) website.

*To safely deploy , manage and recover field teams conducting a search and rescue exercise in difficult terrain.*

This objective was met. Safety was paramount at every level of the exercise – Planners, IMT members and Search team members. Teams were adequately managed. The best demonstration of the ability of the IMT to recover field teams was late Saturday night and the early hours of Sunday morning when participating Police field team members were extracted and redeployed to Christchurch.

*Provide effective communications in the search area.*

This objective was met. Communications were well managed and professional throughout.

*Complete a handover.*

This objective was met. Whilst the IMT on Sunday morning did not get a handover , due to the IMT being decimated of Police members overnight, those left ,quickly set about their business and conducted themselves in accordance with best practise.

Field Teams:

*Sign cut DP's, huts, tracks and travel routes and follow any sign located.*

This Objective was met. As previously mentioned teams were challenged by the dry ground and heat. This proved to be valuable learning.

*Navigate and conduct search techniques in difficult terrain, vegetation and river crossings.*

This objective was met. Whilst some teams were initially challenged by the design of the supplied map they were on task. There were a variety of search techniques used and there was no doubt the terrain was difficult.

Communicate effectively with the IMT.

This objective was met. All teams were able to communicate via radio correctly.



## 7. Appendix

