



# New Zealand Canoeing

## Whitewater New Zealand News

A couple of new people have joined the team. We are very pleased to welcome the aptly named Evan Freshwater as our new Safety Officer. Evan works for the Tourism Industry Association as an advocate, and brings valuable skills to the role in engaging with a variety of organisations to represent the views of white water kayakers. Matt Bennett is our new Access Officer. He is an outdoor instructor with years of experience on the rivers and mountains of the Central Plateau. A big thanks to outgoing Dave Annear for his work as Safety Officer in Wellington and very competent management of an extra challenging Mangahao trip last year, Nick Clendon for his contribution to North Island Conservation and most especially to Matt Barker for many years of service and valuable input on the Exec as Safety Officer.

Whitewater NZ is facing some tricky discussions within the community. As a small group of volunteers, engaging with the wide and often disparate kayaking community is a constant challenge. Traditionally a lot of this is done via the club scene. On both the club and the individual front we are aware that we could do much better. We would love to hear from our members and the kayaking community about any ideas you have. How much and what forms of communication would suit you best? What issues are important to you? You can always get in touch at [whitewaternz@rivers.org.nz](mailto:whitewaternz@rivers.org.nz).

As a first step along better tracking and communication with our members, we are launching a new membership system - watch this space!

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*Louise Jull and Nikki Whitehead clash on the Wairoa extreme race. Photo: Shilo Gibson*

## About New Zealand Canoeing

*New Zealand Canoeing* is the official newsletter of Whitewater NZ Inc. *NZ Canoeing* is published quarterly and distributed free to around 1,200 members of Whitewater NZ throughout New Zealand/Aotearoa. The views expressed in *New Zealand Canoeing* are those of the individual authors and do not necessarily represent those of the Executive of Whitewater NZ.

*NZ Canoeing* welcomes advertising from organisations associated with recreational canoeing. Please contact us for our advertising rates, and find out how to show your products and services to kayakers around NZ.

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as elected at the Whitewater NZ AGM September 2011

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## Safety Course Subsidy

\$100 Safety and Rescue Course subsidies are available to Whitewater NZ members, thanks to the generous support of Water Safety NZ. You can join in on a course organised by the NZ Kayak School or organise with any NZOIA kayak level 2 instructor to run a course for you. A list of instructors and a subsidy form are available from our website - go to [www.rivers.org.nz](http://www.rivers.org.nz) and click on the 'Safe on the river?' banner.

These courses have great content - if you have never taken one there's no time like the present! If you have taken one, refreshers are a good idea.



# Women on Whitewater

by Kylie Laxton-Blinkhorn

On a chilly Friday evening in October 2011, approximately 30 women of all paddling abilities gathered at the Bliss-stick factory in the Rangitikei Valley for a weekend of whitewater adventure. The use of the factory and its surrounding land had been generously offered to the group to use for the weekend by owners Charles and Coke Sage. As car loads of women trickled in through the night and tents sprung up, the event organisers Laila Nystad, Ally Price and Amanda Hogan put the final goodies and T-shirts into goodie bags before stumbling off to their thermarests.

A drizzly Saturday morning arrived and the keen paddling beans that had got to bed early were up and the smell of brewing coffee and frying pancakes wafted across the campground. Tea was delivered to the organisers tents and the day began in earnest. Leaders and seconds were appointed, ability groups were sorted and safety talks were given. Lunches were packed and cars were loaded with boats and stuffed full of paddling paraphernalia, safety gear and bodies. The decision had been made to paddle the scenic section of the Rangitikei river: a gorgeous grade 2 section that winds its way through beautiful gorges. At the put in (River Valley Lodge) more safety talks were given as the rather long shuttle was driven and finally the 5 groups were able to start putting on to the river.

Charles and Coke had told us that the hardest part of the river section was the first 3 drops so it was with some trepidation that the beginners started their journey down the river following their leaders like



Kylie and Jo watch Ali make the boof move. Photo: Candice Bardsley

ducklings follow their mother. The first rapid was a grade 2 rock garden into a big pool. At the bottom there was plenty of time to watch the starting out paddlers wobble their way through the rocks as they found their kayak equilibrium and to scoop a few unlucky swimmers back into their boats before paddling to the start of the next rapid.

Beginning and intermediate paddlers had been advised to walk the second rapid as although not technically difficult all the water pushed through a rock garden before hitting a nasty undercut bluff. After the walk a short ferry glide across flat water put us at the top of the last of the trickier rapids. This consisted of a grade 3 manoeuvre through a rock garden before having to boof a small drop at the bottom. This rapid was perfect for the intermediate paddlers to practice their skills on and after a first success many walked back up a to run it a second time. Beginners lined the bank and happily took photos of the action.

Back in boats, groups reformed to paddle the rest of the section. This was lots of rock gardens, river bends and bluffs that needed negotiating. As the day progressed and the weather became colder and wetter the leading groups started to wonder if the take out would ever come and the leaders were silently fretful that the



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Amanda, Nina, Aimee, Ali. Photo: Candice Bardsley

take out had been missed. Beginner paddlers were getting more confident in their boats but also making more mistakes and missing more rolls as everyone got progressively colder and more tired. Finally, just as the cloud shrouded sun started its final descent to the horizon, the take out was spotted. Gleeful but knackered paddlers clambered out of their boats and started the steep and slippery trek up the road to the cars where food and warm, dry clothing awaited. As we headed back to the Bliss-Stick factory, we were slightly concerned that a search party might have been sent out. On arrival at the factory we found not a search party but something much better: a roaring bonfire and a giant, sizzling BBQ that had been fired up by Charles in anticipation of the pile of steaks that were about to be flung on it. Eager chefs left at the opportunity to cook up the meat while others took to the kitchen to prepare the rest of the feast. Throw

bags were strung up across the factory and lines of paddling kit and thermals were soon dripping onto the factory floor.

Dinner was eaten and beers drunk around the bonfire as stories about the day were shared and prizes were drawn from the loot box. When all prizes had been handed out, Charles and Coke surprised us yet again with another exceptionally generous offer: a new custom built boat for a worthy boater. Names were nominated and put into a hat for drawing out the following day. As a hard frost settled over the tents, weary but happy paddlers slowly made their way away from the fire to the cosy warmth of their sleeping bags.

Sunday arrived sunny and clear and it was decided that the 5 leaders from Saturday would go and paddle the top gorge while the intermediate and beginner groups would walk up the river from the take out and paddle the last few grade 3 rapids of the upper gorge. Another fun, but this time sunny, day was had by all. It was a terrific incident free weekend for women inspiring other women to give this great sport a go. Congratulations go to Maggie Burling who won the brand new Mini Mystic and who had to swim copious times out of her flip stick to prove she needed a new boat. Massive thanks go to Charles and Coke Sage, owners of the Bliss-Stick factory who donated the boat, their time, factory, BBQ and bonfire and helped to make the great weekend what it was. Gratitude also goes to the other major sponsors Rochfort paddles and Surge Helmets who generously give prizes every year to Women on Whitewater.

## Conservation Update

by Tony Ward-Holmes

**Hawea playhole** - The Hawea playhole/course, which was negotiated by Whitewater NZ and Central Otago Whitewater, was supposed to have been built last summer but high lake levels prevented it. That is not a problem this year and work is scheduled for March. The course is designed by 3-time World Slalom Champion and World Freestyle silver-medalist Scott Shipley - it will be really interesting to see how it turns out.

**Nevis River** - Fish & Game's application to add the Nevis River to the Kawarau Water Conservation Order was approved by the Ministry for the Environment's Special Tribunal, on the basis of the threat to the native fish Gollum Galaxiid. The decision was appealed to Environment Court, by Pioneer Energy who wish to

dam the river. This forced Whitewater NZ and other parties to appeal the tribunal decision in order to be allowed to oppose Pioneer in Environment Court. Then in the High Court, Pioneer appealed Fish & Game's defence of a decision based on the presence of a native fish species. Pioneer lost the appeal, and so the Environment Court case will go ahead with Fish & Game's involvement - probably late this year.

**Mokihinui River** - The Environment Court hearing for the Mokihinui Hydro Project is now scheduled to start in September this year, running through into April 2013. For anyone planning to paddle it, be aware that you can considerably reduce your helicopter costs by leaving a shuttle car at the take-out and continuing on to meet the chopper at the Whangapeka track road-end, which is on a straight line between the helicopter base

in Karamea and the put-in. While you are there, check out the progress of the Old Ghost Road, aka the Lyell-Mokihinui track. Mountain bikers have started work on the Mokihinui gorge part of the track and some of it should be usable by the end of summer. Anyone keen to help should check out <http://www.oldghostroad.org.nz/latest-news>

**Tongariro River** - The Tongariro hydro releases were negotiated by Whitewater NZ as mitigation by Genesis Energy when they applied for water-take consents. The Waitangi weekend releases were very well attended: over 100 people on Access 10 with 40 from AUCC (including 3 rafts). There were also a few commercial rafts - maybe another 20 people there. People from Hawkes Bay (5), Taranaki (10ish), Waikato (6ish), Ruahine (15ish), Wellington (22ish), etc. Someone has also been into the Waihohonu River with a chainsaw for a clean-out. Thanks - whoever that was.

**Matakitaki River** - Wayne Mackay, CEO of Network Tasman (who want to dam the Matakitaki) is one of the witnesses for Meridian on the Mokihinui Hydro Project. In his evidence he notes that "As more variable wind energy is introduced into New Zealand's electricity system more hydro schemes will therefore be required to ensure there is reliable security of supply". The Matakitaki Scheme is one of the potential future hydro schemes that Wayne is talking about. Network Tasman are still assessing the Matakitaki River and kayakers should be aware that it is still under

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threat. Your help is needed: keep your own log book and sign the log books at the Matakitaki River (Middle and Lower sections), Hurunui River and Kaituna River (in Okere Falls store); support Whitewater NZ by joining as an individual member; make submissions for relevant consent applications.

## NZKS turns 20!

*By Sarah Fawcett*

The NZ Kayak School celebrated its 20th anniversary recently over the weekend of 28 - 29th January. There was a good turn out of "old dogs", newbies and everything in between. For many of us the kayak school has played a key role in our kayaking careers and it's a great place to return to "brush up" your skills or send your friends who are new to the sport.

Saturday morning saw a mass paddle of the middle Matakitaki with Jeanette Kear getting a little more than she bargained for in the front of the topo duo!

After refuelling the team headed out again for a mass Lower Matakitaki run and on return the BBQ was

fired up and the keg opened. Liam and his mates got the fire going in a pit they had dug earlier in the day. There were good yarns, tall tales and vast amounts of catching up with folks who hadn't seen each other in years. Mick spoke of the history of the school and how he and Pam had come to be standing where they were now. He specifically thanked Peter Kettering and Steve Chapman who he started the school with 20 years ago. The boat slaves also received a special mention and he toasted the first-ever boat slave and the one who would never be with us again.

Thanks to Mick and Pam for the barbeque and beers and for continuing to run what is arguably one of the best places in the world to learn how to kayak.

# Mokihinui, Mokihinui, Mokihinui, Mokihinui, Eh

*Mick Hopkinson*

Just another trip down the Mokihinui? No not really. It was supposed to be a staff training trip down Harwood's Hole with a view to up-skilling the crew on how to abseil and jumal on heavy duty semi-industrial ropes and hardware, as opposed to dicing with death with throwropes and prussicks. However the weather intervened and it became apparent there was a high chance of being drowned in the siphons at the bottom of Harwood's Hole. Since I had been nearly drowned once before down there I wasn't that keen.

So the trip morphed into a two day affair on the Mokihinui where we actually wanted it to rain! It rained really hard on the Sunday and the Mighty Buller was heading for 500 cumecs at Longford (and 5000 at the sea). A great kayaking but an average day for flying. So we flew on a sunny day: Monday. After much consultation with maps and Wayne, our pilot, we left a car at the Seddonville pub and drove to the Western end of the Wangapeka. The carpark contained a mystery object...a car .....a black car...a black car with roof racks and uprights.....a black car with a kayak helmet

and that indefinable interior chaos that shouted that it belonged to kayakers. Mystery kayakers? Who in their right mind would walk up the Wangapeka?

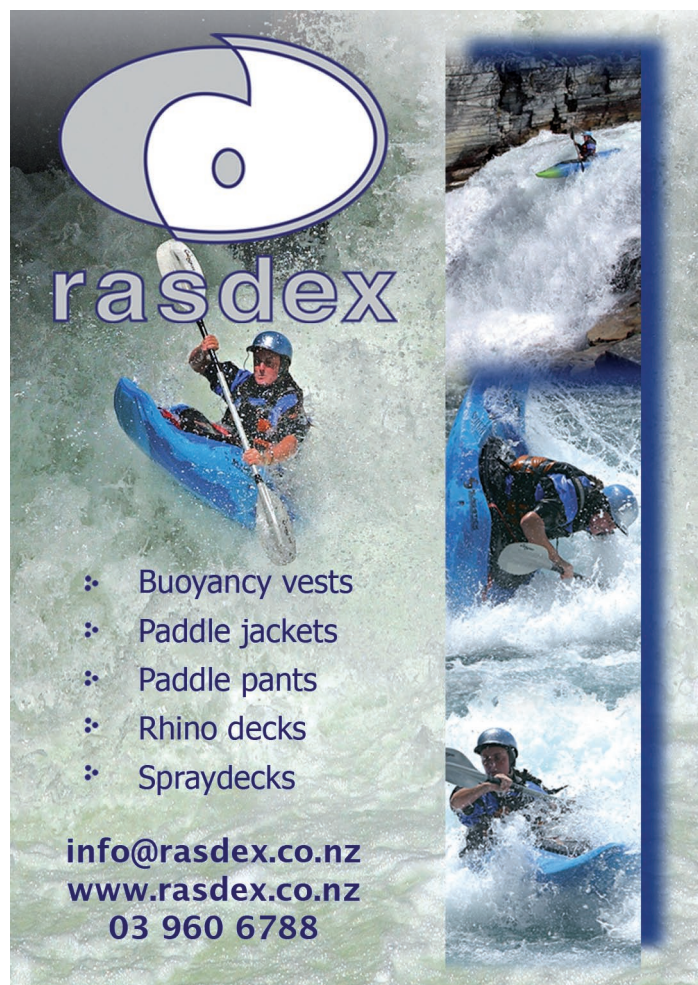
But we walked. Wayne lied to us. "See you in a small clearing about 200 metres upstream from the carpark" he lied. Obviously distance perspective is distorted from the air. However the rendezvous was met and the trip was on. I introduced the staff and mentioned that our boatslave Matt was interested in learning to fly helicopters on the off chance that Wayne might adopt him and show him a thing or two about cyclics and switches and dials. And such. Instead Matt got a homily on the perils of helicopter pilots and marriage. Apparently they don't always make a good match!

A stunning blue sky flight over Kahurangi into the North Johnson and we were deposited next to the DOC (basic) but much loved hut. You should all start taking photographs of your favourite huts to show your grand-kids. The huts won't be around much longer. DOC workers no longer walk in to repair them. Instead they fly in to condemn them. (It's a Cost Benefit Analysis thing you know...cheaper to fly in and knock them down and fly all the bits out than to repair the chimney with 6 nails, a piece of tin and 4 kilos of compliance certificates.)

But don't let's get bitter. The North Johnson had water and we didn't have to walk to the confluence. Well some of us did walk a bit! Daan ran the one class fiver upright for the first half and downright for the second half with just enough cringe factor to make portaging seem honourable.

Thereafter came the confluence with the North Branch of the Mokihinui. A kaleidoscope of colours, deep blue sky, deep green bush, shining white granite and the water a strange milky colour like chang. (the original organic beer..you can still see all the components in the sediment!)

A great flow on a great day that got greater as the tributaries did their bit and we were on a great granite river with gob smacking granite boulders and rapids and it was in New Zealand, not California. For once we had the optimum flow, which is just less than epic. Epic on Class 4 is where you seriously think you could die after every rapid because the river almost ceases to be rapid (Class 4) and pool (Class 0) and starts running



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into rapid and rapid. So the Blackball would rate as epic on a really wet day because one horizon line is very quickly followed by another horizon line in accelerating quick succession which is a verbal attempt at describing a complex mathematical sequence known as geometric progression. This is a big term that means that the river is sneaking up on you at a pace that you cannot comprehend because you keep leaving behind any random points where you used to be able to look at the plumbline on the beach and say "the river is coming up". Geometric progression on class four means you get scared witless before you have even realized that you should be scared witless. This has happened to me before on the Kakapotohi when a group of us were privileged to see a "flood event" from the inside.

None of this happened on the Mokihinui. It was a seamless delight of eddy hopping and boat scouting particularly since we were being led by Daan and Shannon, both hot to trot after a season of dicing with similar but much harder rapids in California. It's especially nice to be at the back and get lots of feedback from the first six paddlers before committing to the horizon lines. Though as the day wore on the hydraulics did get bigger (probably only arithmetically not geometrically) and stickier. What an inane word for having your whole sense of control violently ripped from you by a surging mass of recirculating water! Hydraulics should be measured on the Richter scale for the physical force and on the thereiwashoshit-shouldhavebeenthere scale for pseudo-psychoanalytical damage done to the kayakers ego. Ironically it's where Go-pros cease to show what's really happening. A point of view shot from a head camera attached to a kayaker in a hydraulic can be achieved either by sticking said kayaker in a giant hydraulic or simply chucking the go pro in the washing machine.

Eventually the river slows as does the vim and vigour of the day and we proceed on a slow cruise through the tall standing timber strangled by the earthquake lake at the confluence of the North and South Fork. The hut, so perfectly situated at the confluence that its bound to be condemned. The chimney flashing has fallen off. And since a new chimney flashing, flown in by helicopter will cost more than the original cost of the whole hut put together then it is doomed to die by CBA. After all what price can you put on seven tired but happy kayakers sitting around a blazing fire at the end of a perfect day in comfortably non compliant hut. The toilet was even more non compliant! It had been built below water level, at least it had been built below geometrically progressing water levels. And there was the evidence:- two inches of thick brown sediment on

the toilet seat and a tide mark on the dwang!

Putting two and two together (I was tired) it dawned on me why the walk from the river to the hut (200 metres) had turned into a muddy plod. The whole area at the confluence, hectares of it, had been under water. But not swiftly running water because the tall grass was still standing. The South Branch had completely backed up from the North Branch as the flood had tried to squeeze through the narrow gap cut into the rock band that announces the beginning of the Mokihinui mainstem.

The next day it rained and in our absence without our permission the Mighty Buller shot back up to 550 cumecs at Longford, (our Murchison plumbline) and we were off to Seddonville. But not a KAVU day. Much more a West Coast of New Zealand day. Dark, brooding, heavy with rain and presentiment. The river goes geometric on us!!! Da da da dah! No plumbines, just the water changing colour so that you have to keep reminding yourself it's the same river you started out on earlier except it looks different and feels different and tastes different and its raining and you are surrounded by water. And for some reason its not shining white Cali granite. Its sandstones, siltstones and mudstones. Darkstones, dropped randomly into



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the river bed by endless earthquakes to form lots of “only class 3 “white water. Except that its not white water its brown water and its geometricating ( I think I made that word up..but you get the idea!)

But as the epic potential increases and the weather deteriorates so the gradient slackens and the difficulty eases, unless you consider paddling into a 30 knot gusting headwind difficult.

We struggle across the rain soaked paddock as the cocky rescues his cows (again) and get changed outside the pub. The coal fire is burning and yes we can buy a meal , on a Tuesday morning ...in Seddonville.! Two of the crew drive shuttle whilst we luxuriate in the heat and afterglow.

The pub owners are friendly. They have been there four years. They have never been “up the river”. There is a sign next to the bar that says :-

“The only true wilderness is between a Greenies Ears”. Did the present owners put the sign up? Did they inherit it.? Is it a reflection of local attitudes? What is a Greenie? (Most of the “Greenies” I know have PhDs! )

Had the locals ever heard of Vajont? If you have never heard of it Google it and DO NOT buy a holiday home in Seddonville.

According to Dr Mark Mabin Senior Environmental Scientist for Meridian :-“The Mokihinui Hydro Project will have a less than minor effect on the landscape geomorphology of the Mokihinui area. The total footprint (4.5 km<sup>2</sup>) represents only 0.4 % of the landscape area. The landform directly affected, the Mokihinui River gorge, is a type well represented in the region. The dam and resulting lake will be features not unlike other landslide dammed lakes that are common in this area.”

Is there anything between his ears? Building a fuck-ing great 80 metre high concrete dam and flooding 14 kilometres of gorgeous river and drowning over 450 hectares of West Coast Rainforest is a “less than minor effect”

He could get a job for DOC doing the business, CBA, on nice old huts. Maybe his dad worked in a concentration camp? “Arbeit Macht Frei.” Understatement probably runs in the family.

Me?? I was floating down the Moki, chased by the storm, in a trance. I kept thinking that damming this place could only ever be justified as an absolute last resort. We had to need power so bloody badly that life as we know was about to cease to exist. We had to combine every last kilowatt of power on earth to fire up the rocket ship to get the survivors of the nuclear



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ramea! It geometrized on them to the tune of 2300  
 cumecs. Time for a “less than minor effect” to take  
 place on that river as well. Save those lunatics from  
 themselves.

## How good is your rescue kit and techniques? Part 2.

By Matt Barker

In Part 2 of this investigation set out to try  
 to answer these questions,

1. Which of the current mechanical advantage rescue techniques are best suited to the equipment available?
2. What force can a 3 man team generate?
3. Are there any experimental techniques that could improve the force generation and safety of the rescue system?

Fig.1 shows the force able to be applied by a 3-man rescue team. With the inclusion of small nylon Petzl Ultralegere karabiner pulleys, the force able to be applied was increased by 30%. The inclusion of slings in the haul system to allow the haulers to pull with the sling round their backs rather than holding the rope in their hands only, yielded a 12% increase in force. The haulers stated that the limiting factor, when just hands were applied, was their grip on the rope and that with the sling it was much easier to create a higher force but the limiting factor then became their traction.

On the riverbank, there may well be boulders, tree roots or stumps that may allow greater forces to be applied with the sling system. The most significant increase in force was with a vector pull, using no additional equipment the force generated by our 3-man team was increased by 37%. Even more surprising is the fact that the original tensioning was achieved by a 2-man team, as one was locking the system off, so the actual increase from a 2-man 3:1 pulley to 3-man vector pull was 107%, making this a very efficient use of limited resources.

Table 4. shows the results of the throw rope tests designed to test handling properties. There was a great variation in how the ropes were to hold, some were found to be too slippery and slid through the hands, while others with a coarse sheath were painful for the rescuer to hold onto.

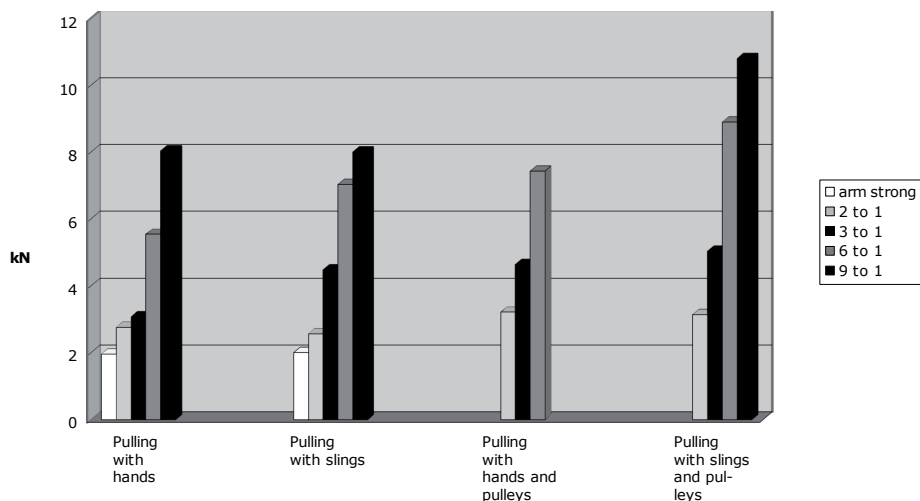


Figure 1: 3 man force generation

The worst combination was a coarse sheath of slippery material as this slipped through the hands and felt like a cheese grater as it did so. In order to pack the ropes into bags the ropes need to be soft and flexible, which the braids were but then they also needed to have sufficient weight to them to throw, which the braids lacked. The 6mm ropes were too thin for the rescuer to hold onto and ropes greater than 8mm are too bulky to get sufficient length in the bags.

The abrasion tests saw the braided ropes out perform the kernmantle ropes. Of the stronger ropes, Southern Ocean's Southern light braid was a clear winner showing little sign of wear at full distance. The Robline extreme survived the full test with its sheath intact, with the Spectralite rope's sheath failing at 30% of the distance, the Esprit rope at half distance and the PMI rope having worn through the sheath by full distance. The worst performer was the Esprit rope that was literally in tatters at the full test distance.

Rope	Throwing	Holding
Spectralite 8mm	Hard to pack into bag	A bit slippery
Southern light	A bit light to throw. Packs easily	Good to hold onto
Robline extreme	Throws well	Very slippery but didn't grate hands
Spectralite 6mm	Get lots in a bag	Slippery and rather thin to hold
Esprit Swift waterline	A bit stiff to pack	Slippery to hold
PMI water rescue 7mm	A bit stiff to pack	Slippery to hold
Robline Albatross	OK to Throw	Slippery and coarse to hold

Table 4: Rope handling

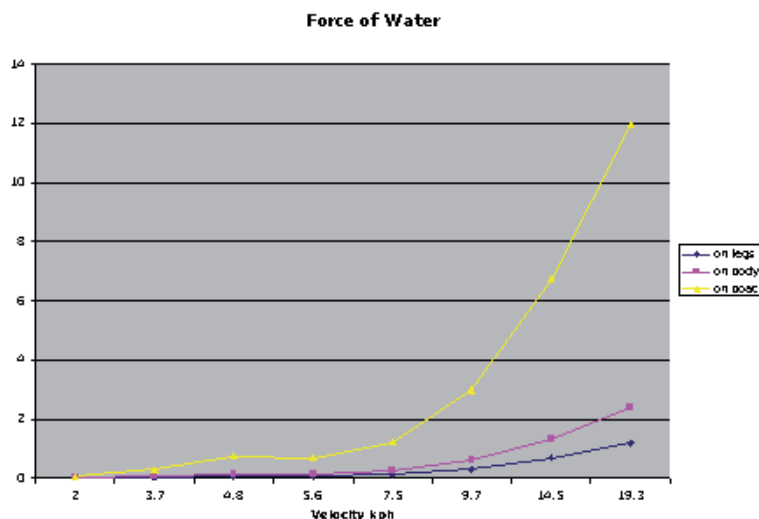


Fig 2: Drag of objects held in flowing water

So in conclusion, what do the results of our tests mean in the actual rescue environment? The force applied by moving water has an exponential relationship to the speed of flow. However the speed of water is not the only factor that rescuers have to overcome, as there is usually a large component of friction adding to the force required to free an object. Friction has a relationship to pressure and also rises exponentially, but is not calculated here, as friction is dependent on the way objects are trapped and the surface they are held against. The forces created by drag are 12 kN for a swamped kayak and over 2 kN for a body in water flowing at 5.3 metres per second. These figures will increase in faster flows and including variables based on friction, could lead to somewhat larger forces in actual rescues.

Thoracic injury is avoided at loads of 4 kN and 50% will receive injury of broken ribs on one side when well-distributed loads of 6.9 kN are applied to the shoulders and chest, with a maximum survivable force of 8kN. Forces required to damage the vertebrae in adults is between 6 and 8 kN.

Given the above, rescue harnesses in buoyancy aids should be manufactured to withstand forces of between 6 and 8kN as a minimum as it is better to rescue someone injured than leave them to drown because the equipment failed at loads as low as 2 kN as is presently the case. It is of little use to have some parts of the same rescue system built to take forces of 9.8 kN when they are dependent on other components that fail at as low as 2 kN. The separate components should be matched in their strength rating and an overall minimum rating should be formulated for these safety items. At present some buoyancy aid rescue harnesses could potentially fail under the forces generated by even simple rescues.

Haul systems need to be able to produce loads of over 10 kN in order to rescue swamped kayaks or canoes in swift water. Using prusik knots to form a 3 to 1 pulley system will give

you a safety valve allowing slippage before the rope breaks but will ultimately limit the forces able to be applied to any system. It is therefore counter productive to apply a mechanical advantage system greater than 3 to 1, as the prusik will likely slip at greater loadings particularly when used on slippery Spectra sheathed or blended ropes. It is recommended to use a device such as the Petzl Tibloc to create a mechanical advantage haul system where it is necessary to have a traveling attachment point on the main haul line as this produces a stronger and more consistent traveling attachment point.

The strongest haul systems were created using Spectra cored Polypropylene sheathed or Polypropylene and Spectra mixed braids of 8mm diameter using a Marlinspike hitch and karabiner pulleys wherever the rope ran round a karabiner. Indeed the reduction in friction with the addition of plastic karabiner pulleys added the equivalent of an extra person to a 3-man team making them well worth their 10 gram weight.

Pulling using slings attached to the main haul line also creates a useful boost to peak force generation and may be even better in places where there is better traction.

Ropes for aquatic rescue should be manufactured containing a significant proportion of floating fibres (Spectra, polypropylene and polyethylene). The ropes core and sheath should have similar elongation characteristics, so that the sheath and core share loads and are therefore stronger per cross sectional area than ropes where the core and sheath behave differently. Ropes of a braided design stood up to abrasion much better but where kernmantle designs are used the sheath should be relatively thick so as to remain integral after in-use abrasion. These ropes should be manufactured with a target knotted tensile strength in excess of 10 kN in 8 mm diameter form, to be aligned with the strength of attachment points on kayaks, the maximal survivable loads through chest harnesses and the likely forces required in rescue of swamped kayaks canoes or rafts.



Matt Barker in white.

# Wairehu Playhole



By Matt Bennett

Tucked away in a small piece of swamp country between well-regarded rivers is a small hydraulic feature that will one day be the centre of urban legends and acrobatic feats.

The Wairehu Playhole is towards the end of a gravel road along the south-western side of the Wairehu Canal, which is part of the Tongariro Power Scheme. The playhole was built by Genesis Energy in recognition of kayaking resources lost as a result of the western diversion. After a few dollars were spent Brett Donaldson was dispatched into the feature. No one (except Brett) will ever know what got broken, but his nose will never be the same. The next part of the story involves Genesis moving the decimal point several places in their construction bill and seeking out the legend, Scott Shipley to design something more kayaker friendly.

Then came the dark times. It sat there not really knowing what it was. A few folks went out to test it. Kylie Laxton Blinkhorn rode the wave and said it can be done. Matthew Bennett jumped on and said it's an 80% job. Even Brett had the courage to return and the local boy made everyone else look slow. Genesis increased the flow and holy cow! The Wairehu Playhole was fantastic. One of the celebrity paddlers was heard to make reference to 'the best play hole in NZ'. Genesis knew that it wasn't a realistic resource if it required that sort of flow. They got a few more engineers, hydrologists, bean counters, some

test kayakers, a raft and a supervisor to try again. They backed up the water using heavy machinery and it was great. They then made it permanent and the kayakers of NZ get a fantastic surf feature. Seriously, it's really really good.

## The facts:

Best surfing level is 18-24 cumecs.

Flowphone: (07) 386 8113, option 2 – Whanganui Flows, then wait till the very end. Takes about 2 minutes to find out.

To get there:

Take SH 47 from Turangi towards National Park. Approximately 15 km from town you'll cross the Wairehu Canal. Immediately afterwards on the south west side (true right of canal) is a gravel road on the left. Go 2.9km along the road. Look for the only drop that isn't scary. It will also have space to park and a toilet.

**Get in your play boat and huck large. Get out before you go over the next drop. That is the most terrifying hydraulic I've ever seen.**

## Releases and Events

### Wairoa River Release from McLaren Falls

4, 11, 18 and 25 March	10:00 - 16:00
1, 15 and 29 April	10:00 - 16:00
13 May	10:00 - 16:00

### Pukaki Release

24 March, 9 April	09:00 - 14:00
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### Piripaua Release

15 April	09:00 - 15:00
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### Bullerfest 2012

Postponed until 2013

Refer to our website ([rivers.org.nz/events/](http://rivers.org.nz/events/)) for the latest release schedules, including flow information.

river, boof, waterfall, sieve, huck, drop, paddle, rock, loop, cartwheel, air, nature, float, explore, canoe, white water, buffer, travel, experience, rescue, slide, spin, ferry, attain, eddy, whirlpool, cataract, gorge, swim, blunt, kayak, fun, scout, hydraulic, play, portage, creek, slalom, grade, carve, inspire, power, pourover, stroke, slice, pfd, donkey flip, helmet, race, wave, expedition, friends, lines, camping, throw-bag, movies, trips, adventures, knife, ecology, fitness, life, lateral, gate, undercut, lifejacket, carry, challenge, pour-over, competition, breath, crank, shuttle, mission, sunshine, passion, road-trip, events, prizes, tips, techniques, pin-drop, seal launch,

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