

Management of 'ROCK A' RANGITAIKI RIVER

1. Background

This report has been compiled by Ray Sperling of Pro-Adventure.co.nz, having been contracted by Jon J Moore, Maritime Manager Harbourmaster for Environment Bay of Plenty (EBOP), to consult on the issue of 'Rock A' on the Rangitaiki River.

The Maritime Safety Authority (MSA) report, number 03 0958, by MSA Safety Inspector Ian Clarke, advised EnvBOP that preventative action must be taken on 'Rock A' after two fatal accidents occurred.

MSA report 03 0958 states:

- **Contributing factors**
3.1 "The flow of water through the underwater gap in 'Rock A' created a known extreme hazard, where people who fall out of a craft may be trapped."
- **Recommendations**
5.2 "This was the second fatal accident to take place at 'Rock A'. There was also a serious incident at 'Rock A' in May 2002. It is therefor considered that action is taken to inform river users about the danger, and, if possible, to eliminate the hazard associated with the gap between the rocks. The hazard was caused by the flow of water through the gap between the rocks."

2. Consent to complete the management of this know hazard is sought from the following parties:

- Environment Bay Of Plenty
- Maritime Safety Authority
- Nagti Manawa
- Commercial Users
- Recreational Users
- Trust Power
- Department of Conservation
- Police

3. History

'Rock A' is situated at latitude 38 degrees 33.294 South and longitude 176 degrees 40.884 East, on the Rangitaiki River in the Kaingaroa Forest near the township of Murupara.

'Rock A' consists of two rocks. Their uppermost parts are in contact, but there is a gap beneath the surface. The river flow is deflected around 'Rock A' and the main channel is to the right but with considerable flow also to the left. On the upstream face, where the stream diverges, the water level is raised. The flow through the

underwater gap between the rocks is strong enough to trap a person beneath the surface.

Two deaths have taken place at 'Rock A', the first being a Dutch tourist on a commercial rafting trip on the 22nd of January 2001 and the second being an Auckland lady on a non-commercial rafting trip on the 26th of January 2003. An entrapment was reported in May of 2002.

Up until the first fatal accident two years ago, there were no reported serious incidents at 'Rock A'. However, I have personally heard of and witnessed countless river users being thrown in the water due to making contact with the right hand side rock at 'Rock A', or from the mine field of rocks directly up stream.

4. Consultation

There are seven main parties involved in the use of the river, its safety and/or its protection. Consultation between MSA, EBOP, commercial and recreational water users, local Iwi, police and Trust Power has been ongoing since the second fatality in January 2003.

A meeting was held at Ngati Manawa office in Murupara. All parties were approached to find a solution to prevent more fatalities and accidents. Permission from the local Iwi to attempt quick fix sand bagging of the hole was granted.

In March 2003 all parties were represented at the site and the sand bagging operation was attempted. This attempt failed mainly due to the large amounts of water passing through more than one gap beneath the rocks. This only became evident once Trust Power reduced water levels below their consent requirements for 2 hours on the day. The remaining water flow being still too great for the effective placement of the bags.

On receiving the report into the latest death from MSA a meeting was held on Monday 22nd December 2003 between interested commercial / recreational river users and EBOP. This was to discuss further options to manage 'Rock A'. If feasible, moving the rock was the preferred outcome of the meeting, it was also agreed that further consultation was needed from Ngati Manawa, Police and other interested parties.

A meeting on site took place on 14th January 2004 between Leaders of Ngati Manawa, Fletcher Challenge, EBOP and myself. Various solutions were discussed, with moving one of the rocks being the preferred option. Graham Lowe of Fletcher Challenge gave advice on the feasibility of moving rocks. The other options were to place natural or man-made objects such as steel mesh, sand bags and/or rocks in the gap. **EBOP also have the option to close this section of river completely to all river users due to the current high risk to public safety and their legal obligations to local council to manage this known hazard.**

Contact was made with Constable Rob Hutchins of the Murupara Police Station on Friday 16th January 2004, he advised that he would be in favor of the moving of 'Rock A' to river right in order to eliminate the hazard. He was pleased to hear that Bill Bird (local Iwi) was also in favor and had reservations about the steel mesh option. Constable Hutchins was involved in both body recoveries at 'Rock A' and knows its dangers only too well.

5. Reviewed Methods of Hazard Management

Moving 'Rock A' to river right

Transportation of 30 tonne excavator to site river right of 'Rock A'
Excavate small platform river right of 'Rock A'
Move rock to river right and out of main current.
Tidy up location and return excavator to the transporter.

This is the most cost effective and mutually agreed upon option. It eliminates the hazard known as 'Rock A' from the main flow of water. After consultation with Graham Lowe (Fletcher Roding contractor) it was suggested that an old logging track would be used to access the location. This logging track is approximately 500 meters North of the road. It is anticipated that access by transporter could be accomplished, and we await confirmation from Graham after his site inspection. Once the excavator is on site at 'Rock A' it will build a small platform using rocks and earth from the surrounding flood plain. The rock in question will then be within reach of the excavator and rolled to river right out of the main flow of water, allowing for 90 percent of river flow to pass uninterrupted.

This is the safest option as it does not involve people in the water and can be completed with the following:

- Excavator driver
- A supervisor with knowledge in river hydrology and earthmoving experience
- A representative from Ngati Manawa that has excellent knowledge of the site
- A representative from EBOP
- A representative from the recreational users
- A representative from MSA
- A representative from the commercial users

Graham Lowe indicates that there would be minimum damage to the secondary growth that has built up over the 20 years of disuse, and within a short period there would little visible evidence of the work being carried out.

In summary we have completed the consulting process and wish to now proceed with the risk management of 'Rock A' as described above.

Please fill in the following and return to: jon@envbop.govt.nz.

I (we) declare to have read and understood the above proposal Management of 'ROCK A' RANGITAIKI RIVER and agree to the suggested action to be taken.

Signed _____ Title _____

Signed _____ Title _____

Company _____

Dated this ____/____/2004