

New Zealand

USAR

Search Dog Association

Newsletter 11 – November 2005

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Apologies for the time between newsletters- but as promised this is a “bumper” edition. As the articles show the last few months have “generated” some interesting stories- from the inaugural training workshop in July, the training opportunities utilised by members, the recent CREP and the deployments of our overseas peers to Hurricanes Katrina and Wilma and the devastating Pakistan earthquake- hence a look at our border control arrangements. A big thanks to those who have provided articles.

It is with great sadness that I also include an article in memory of Nix- our thoughts with Nathan and Donna...You may have noticed in DogTalk and other publications reference to the “rainbow bridge”. This is a poem of unknown source that it seems appropriate to include in this edition of our newsletter.

Post note: While this newsletter was being finalised I have had to deal with the loss of my own “partner in crime”- so not what I was expecting. The reality of life without Kahlie has not really hit me yet – she was full of beans and I was looking forward to a search career with her that was just starting to take shape...thank you so much to those who have sent me e-mails or given me a ring over the last few days- I really appreciate it. I will try to write something for the next newsletter- Janelle

In the news

www.k9forensics.org - this is the site for the Institute of Canine Forensics that Shirley Hammond is involved in

www.disasterdog.org - sure most of you have already found this website set up by the FEMA Canine Sub-Committee. Some good articles and items of interest.

When Shirley was here she recommended this book if anyone can find it: “ANIMALS IN TRANSLATION, by Temple Grandin. It is a very good book. Makes one think about how we are relating to our dogs”

www.rapid.org.uk This is the website of the international response team from the UK- they received quite a bit of media attention from Pakistan earthquake and I understand they are the guys who have had a bit of a nightmare getting them and their dogs back to the UK.

Rainbow Bridge

Just this side of heaven is a place called Rainbow Bridge.

When an animal dies that has been especially close to someone here, that pet goes to Rainbow Bridge.

There are meadows and hills for all of our special friends so they can run and play together.

There is plenty of food, water and sunshine, and our friends are warm and comfortable.

All the animals who had been ill and old are restored to health and vigor; those who were hurt or maimed are made whole and strong again, just as we remember them in our dreams of days and times gone by.

The animals are happy and content, except for one small thing; they each miss someone very special to them, who had to be left behind.

They all run and play together, but the day comes when one suddenly stops and looks into the distance. His bright eyes are intent; His eager body quivers.

Suddenly he begins to run from the group, flying over the green grass, his legs carrying him faster and faster.

You have been spotted, and when you and your special friend finally meet, you cling together in joyous reunion, never to be parted again. The happy kisses rain upon your face; your hands again caress the beloved head, and you look once more into the trusting eyes of your pet, so long gone from your life but never absent from your heart.

Then you cross Rainbow Bridge together....

Nix



On the 29th of July 1998, I picked up a little barking fluff-ball from the pound in Levin. It curled up on my partner's lap and sat there for the duration of the trip back to Wellington. Nix grew to almost 40Kg but unfortunately never quite grew out of his fondness for sitting in my lap!

What do you say to someone whose search dog has just died?

Donna and I have felt the tremendous sense of loss over the last few days, that I cannot begin to describe ... but that feeling has been lessened by the outpouring of love and kind thoughts from the SAR community throughout New Zealand. I cannot thank each of you enough for your kind wishes, emails and phone calls.

I thought rather than make this a sad tribute, I'd tell you a few of the funny things that have happened along this fantastic journey I've taken with Nix.

One of the earliest notes in Nix's training diary is *"Nix hasn't peed inside for 3 days now!!!"* Isn't it funny how far you come, yet how important each little step is?

On a SAREX in Levin we'd stopped to make a brew and catch our breath. We could hear the comms team calling us but they couldn't hear us replying. Nix was roaming around in the dark in his shiny new glow-collar. The next thing I heard was the Iroquois crew saying, *"Levin SAR base, no sign of team 2, but there's a dog down there hooning around with its headlights on!"*

One of the assessors said to me during a LandSAR exam, "where's your dog?". I replied, "See that tree way over there that's waving about? He'll be right there sitting on the patient slobbering in their face."

Sure enough... one wet-faced patient was soon located.

I do feel sorry for my patient's that don't actually like the taste of Nix slobber!!

Speaking of patients, I had no idea how many poor souls I'd hidden or buried so they could be sniffed, licked, slobbered on and barked at! Over the last two days I've received something in the order of 50 emails, text messages and phone calls. It makes me very proud to know he had such a positive effect on so many people, most of whom would gladly get back in a hole or under some rubble for Nix and I.

If you told me 7 years ago that I'd do half the things I have with my dog, I'd never have believed you. He has taken me to both ends of the country, into some of the most hideous terrain I never want to see again, and to the doorstep of my beautiful wife!

You see, Donna met my dog before she met me. In fact she couldn't even remember me! Such is the impression he made on people (usually the wet licky, slobbery, cold nose kind of impression). Were it not for going to a SAREX in a swamp with my dog, I may never have met her.

Since that SAREX Nix and I have ridden in rescue boats, front end loaders, helicopters, planes and virtually everything with four wheels.

I had an Iroquois pilot say to me at the last SAREX *"Wow, I've never seen a dog drag its handler into the aircraft before!"*

When we winched out of choppers, Nix always felt it necessary to help keep us up by spinning his tail furiously. Maybe he thought merely wagging it wasn't enough...

Nix was like that, you could never deny him a ride in something. The mere sound of my car keys and he was in the back of the ute... thump thump thump of his tail bashing into the side of it.

We used to take the search dogs to pet expos. One thing that never ceased to amaze me was how Nix would put up with two straight days of pats, cuddles, tail pulls and pokes and prods from endless children. Okay, maybe the pats and cuddles weren't such hard work! But he was so incredibly gentle with children it amazed me that they would happily cuddle up to this huge black thing.

When I first got Nix I was too scared to let him off leash in a park. I'd never had a dog before and was terrified he wouldn't come back. He did come back, usually if I ran away from him... and so began our SAR training without me even realising it.

But Nix *did* wander off when he was young. One fine Saturday morning I couldn't find him anywhere. I spent about half an hour calling and walking around the street. Finally I wandered down to the end of the street to the rugby fields at the school where we often walked. Imagine my embarrassment at having to go on to the field and take the rugby ball off my puppy and give it back to the referee!! To this day I have no idea how long they'd been chasing him around trying to retrieve it.

On the morning of our wedding, Donna bathed both dogs in preparation for the big day. It was a cold morning, and as Nix and Abby played outside, Nix obviously decided that Abby was either cold, or not clean enough. The next thing Donna saw was Nix giving Abby a wee 'shower'!! The bridesmaids couldn't stop laughing and Donna had to bath Abby all over again.

He taught me all about making big obvious STUPID mistakes and how to laugh about them. At the end of the day, you have to try not to lose sight of what's really important and his happy-go-lucky tail wagging always brought me back to reality.

He taught me about unconditional love and trust.

He has left a massive hole in my life and yet he also filled it with so much joy.

And for those that have had to do a training session with my lad still in the ute, you'll appreciate how eerily quiet the ute is now. I'll miss the tail thumping against the canopy, the back end bouncing up and down as he announces to the world that he'd like to be out searching thank you very much!

He was my best friend, my team mate and my confidante. It was a hell of a ride and I wouldn't trade any of it.

Nix now lies in the sun in my front yard at the foot of a Kowhai tree surrounded by wild daffodils, he finally has a fetch-it to keep after barking so hard for it for seven years. I hope one day he will be able to watch my children play around his tree, and I'll sit in it's shade and tell them about him.



You'll never be replaced nor far from my thoughts little fella.

Inaugural Training Weekend

Between 22 and 24 July USAR handlers from throughout New Zealand met in Wellington for the inaugural national training weekend. The course was based at Trentham Army Camp, which was great for accommodation and food etc. Much of the organisation was done by Central Search Dogs and they did a great job getting us a huge variety of training venues.

We started by dividing into 2 groups and rotating between the tunnels below CPIT and a yard of assorted building materials/junk- 2 really contrasting sites with the tunnels being quite foreign to some of the dogs with some tight squeezes for handlers and dogs.

In the afternoon we headed over to Porirua to utilise the old Kenepuru Hospital grounds. This was an opportunity for some of the more senior dogs to have a "test" set up amongst the wood piles in the courtyard, while others were able to use the old buildings for training scenarios.

On Saturday morning we headed to a very large industrial yard where the Tawa Response Team provided logistical and other support. This was a great training location with multiple teams able to work at once on the site. In the afternoon we headed into Wellington city to the decommissioned F69 frigate.

This was a really interesting training venue, and I would imagine fairly unique. Even getting the dogs onto the boat was valuable training with narrow stairs, darkened passages, a multitude of obstacles on the floor and slippery surfaces. It proved to be more suitable for the senior dogs in terms of searching but was a great experience for all the dogs, and others were able to utilise the large construction site adjacent for runaways etc. On Sunday morning Trentham Raceway was set up with agility equipment, a cableway, direction and control with some building available for search work- a real smorgasbord of options!

For our first national training weekend I think it was a huge success and on reflection some of the key points that stand out for me are:

- The training starts the minute we leave home and is so much more than just the actual searching- travelling, socialisation, kennelling, working when tired, different training people and venues.
- The value of "trained" subjects- in some books they are called helpers and I think this is a good reflection of their role- it is crucial.
- The need to clearly brief subjects on what to do when working with the dogs
- Training is training and we need to set the dogs up to succeed- not over test them
- It is really "re-vitalising" to meet with others and share their enthusiasm, ideas and experiences and we all have something to offer.





Some key USAR people attended at different stages over the weekend with a significant outcome of them observing the dogs at work, and talking with handlers is that the next training weekend will be full funded from the USAR budget- great news. Thanks to CSD, and I look forward to catching up with you all at the next training weekend!
Janelle Mackie

Joint Training Opportunity

This article featured in the recent Wellington Emergency Management Office (WEMO) newsletter and Sue forwarded on for inclusion- thanks Sue.

WEMO recently organised extensive training with the Westpac Rescue helicopter for members of the Wellington City Rescue Team and fire fighters from the Wellington Rural Fire Force to provide them with the skills needed if they have to be winched into an incident scene.

The ground practice sessions were held in the hangar at the Westpac base and the teams trained using a mock helicopter winch on the training wall. They practised in the hangar with two types of victim harness and one crew harness, but used only the full-body crew harness for the live-flight training.

“Once everybody was proficient with the ground training, they flew out to a local area and put into practice what they had learned that morning,” says Jock Darragh, Principal Rural Fire Officer, WEMO.

Each participant was winched into and out of the helicopter on a single winch, before practising being winched in and out as pairs. The only exceptions were Sue Chesterfield and the rescue team’s search dog Nugget, who were winched together. Sue says that Nugget did really well, only showing some nerves when she had to disembark from the helicopter 50 metres above the ground.

Nugget is a seasoned trooper, having qualified on national standards two years ago. The black Labrador is now seven years old and Sue, her owner and trainer, thinks she will work effectively for at least another three years. Her function is to search for people who are trapped in voids in buildings when a disaster such as an earthquake hits.

“She has to use her own skills and intelligence, as well as take orders,” says Sue. Sometimes she has to have the choice of not going there because she can see more than I can – a bit of civil disobedience can be a good thing!”

“The day was a complete success for dog and humans, and all the participants are looking forward either to putting their new skills into practice, or to the next training sessions”, says Jock.



CREP 2005

The 2005 CREP (Canine Readiness Evaluation Process) was held in Christchurch at Labour weekend. Nine dog teams took part – 4 for Basic Certification, 4 for Advanced Certification and 1 for Advanced recertification. We were very fortunate to have Shirley Hammond from the US here again to undertake the Advanced assessments with Paul George, while Paul worked with Linda and Brenda on the Basic assessments, with Jenny Waters again evaluating Element 5 (Veterinary) for both Basic and Advanced.

Fortuitously Graham Joseph agree to take on the CREP coordination role, and he worked with Chris Schraders from MCDEM to make sure everyone knew where to be when and with everything they need...from assessors, handlers, subjects, helpers, observers.....a big job!

Saturday saw the Basic Elements 1-5, Advanced Elements 1-5 and then finally the Rubble search for Basic candidates which had progressed to this stage (3). One team (myself and Kahlie) passed the Basic assessment.

This set us up for a big day on Sunday with the aim to get all 5 dogs through the 3 Advanced piles. We are very lucky with our rubble site in Christchurch as all the “hides” were able to be built on Friday with assistance from TF2, and we were also able to work ahead of the assessors hiding subjects and distractions meaning a very short turn around time.

The weather gods were nice to us and both days were sunny with a light breeze. All the dogs worked extremely well. Linda Pike and Mij, Brenda Woolley and Easy and Malcolm York and Jack were all assessed to the Advanced level, while Brenda and Milo reassessed to the Advanced level and Sue Chesterfield and Nugget were reassessed to Basic level.

So...while we had 8 operational teams in NZ immediately following the CREP, we now have 7, 4 Advanced and 3 Basic (2 not requiring recertification).

It was really positive to hear both Shirley and Paul comment on the improvement in the quality of the dogs.

Tail End of the Journey

This article written by Hugh Creasy appeared in the Dominion Post and was sent through to me by Sue Chesterfield- the end is a good summary of what many of us think about our working with our canine search partners.

Sam has grown cunning with age. He is big, black and strong, with a rime of silver around his muzzle. When he drinks he drips water and when he eats he brooks non interference from other dogs.

He knows his place and how to hold it, but he's old and his bones ache. When he runs, his hindquarters are held tight, the pain of arthritis beginning to take its toll. At the end of a day's hunting he stiffens up and finds relief in sleep.

It wasn't always like that. Ten years ago he arrived at his new owner's home and a timorous wee pup, barely six weeks old.

Even then he was deep-chested and long-legged, showing the best attributes of a Labrador bred for the field.

He was confused and lonely, and showed it in the only way we knew, with a powerful bark that within a few weeks was driving the neighbors to distraction.

A bark collar taught him restraint but did nothing to dampen his spirit. He was born to hunt and within a few months that is what he was doing, with a deep and abiding happiness.

He relished the challenge of chills waters and long retrieves, the scent of pheasant and quail, rabbit and hare- the prey his master trained him to prefer. He flushed the birds to be shot and retrieved them with a bright-eyed pride.

The hunting season, though, was just a few months of the year and he had to get along with his human companions.

It took time for his to establish his place in the order of things. He has a natural tendency to dominate- what is called alpha behaviour and it took time for him to reach and uneasy truce with his owners.

Patience has transformed what could be dangerous behavior, in a less caring environment, to a form of courageous and protective loyalty, highly prized by all dog owners.

Sam welcomes those he knows are welcomed by his owners and his suspicious of those who are not.

I like to think, though I know it is anthropomorphic, that male Labradors have a sense of humour. They are jolly dogs who would chuckle at banana- skin humour, but would also show concern at serious misfortune.

Sam has all these attributes plus the wisdom and patience drawn from experience. It is a patience that has been sorely tested.

First, there was the arrival of the boy, who as a baby, received from Sam surreptitious licks, which the dog deemed necessary to welcome the babe into the pack. Babies grow and Sam was pummelled and poked, squeezed and hugged with affectionate enthusiasm.

A few months ago, Sam was joined by Jess, an adorable, sharp-toothed Lab bitch puppy. She attached herself to Sam, emotionally and physically. She gnawed the loose skin of his neck enough to draw blood and forced him into games he did not want to play.

All this mistreatment he took with patient aplomb, only seeking relief when visitors came and Jess transfers her attention to them. Now he's old and seeks to avoid contact with ebullient youth. It seems the passing of time has been accelerated.

I knew him when the fire of youth still drove him, when, with my Brittany pointer; they would work as a team putting up peacocks, pheasants and geese from heavy gorse and scrub. The little pointer is too small to retrieve such big birds, and left the task up to Sam who would wrestle the birds out of the gorse after they had been shot.

He still has a season or two to go in the hard country, but he'll be at his best over water: A rubdown with a towel will help him recover.

It's the speed of aging that has taken me by surprise. I should be familiar with it, having owned a Labrador myself. Our brief contact with animals is rewarded by giving them the opportunity to reach their potential.

Domesticated dogs are faulted animals, arrested in development by human interference. With working dogs and gundogs, we can give them the opportunity to utilise their intelligence in activities as near as possible to those they would meet in the wild.

It is the marvellous interaction between humans and canines that opens a wonderful world to us. The world of scent and hearing, way beyond our own capabilities, is brought into our reach. We add the dog's dimension to our own.

This interaction of the species has accelerated our development and we have a duty to control it. Breeding bug-eyed carpet chewers out of such magnificent beasts goes well outside nature's role for any animal.

Vanity dogs have no place in nature. Give a dog a purpose and its transformation will amaze any owner.

Even though Sam is fated to a brief existence, he has experienced the joy of the hunt, he has exhausted himself in fulfilment and his demeanour shows that satisfaction.

Jess's time will come. Sam will show her how to pursue and retrieve, and for a brief time she will hunt with Ren the pointer; complementing his talent, before he too, will be too old to hold his own place.

Old dogs play out their time in their dreams, yipping in sleep as games are played once more. They wake and sleepily peer out at the world before closing their eyes retreating to dreamy refuge till time comes when their eyes do not open and the dreams fade into darkness.

Border Control Issues in New Zealand

"It sometimes does us a power of good to remind ourselves that we live on two volcanic rocks where two tectonic plates meet in a somewhat lonely stretch of windswept ocean just above the Roaring Forties. If you want drama you've come to the right place."

Right Honourable Sir Geoffrey Palmer, 1990.

I have always found this quote "grounding" but when talking about border control issues is also highlights our vulnerability to a range of diseases and ailments which many government agencies constantly monitor our borders for.

The issue of border control arrangements for USAR events is not a new one, and inter-agency workshops and meetings, often headed by John Lovell from MCDEM, have been held. My understanding is that these meeting have had a focus on protecting our borders, while still allowing the acceptance into New Zealand of resources need to respond to a USAR, or other emergency event. From a canine perspective this has meant establishing protocols for search dogs coming to NZ to help us. Following the recent earthquake in Pakistan a number of handlers have asked me what arrangements do we have if our dogs are deployed overseas and then come to return to NZ? Good questions...for which we do not have clear answers- but they are now on the agenda for further discussion at national level through the established channels for looking at border control. The types of things we need to consider are: additional vaccinations etc for our certified dogs on an ongoing basis, protocols for vet checks and boosters if they call for deployment comes in, and very importantly protocols for coming back to NZ so that lengthy quarantines are not required. These also need to be looked at in the context of the overall international deployment capability of NZ USAR resources. I believe this will not be all sorted straight away, but we need to start somewhere and Australia and the Pacific seem obvious choices. I will keep members informed as I hear more, and continue to liaise with John and others.

Janelle Mackie

Upcoming Events

Date	Activity	Details	Involved
24-27 Nov	South Island Wilderness Assessment course	Blenheim	NZ Land SAR
10-12 Feb 06	North Island Wilderness Training Weekend	?Palmerston North	NZ Land SAR
10-12 March 06	South Island Wilderness Training Weekend	Lake Sumner	NZ Land SAR
8-9 April 06	Basic Instructional Techniques	North Island	Devereux-Blum Training and Development
27-28 May 06	USAR Awareness Trainers Course	North Island	Devereux-Blum Training and Development

For more information about the USAR Search Dog Association and/or USAR Search Dogs in New Zealand please contact:

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