

New Zealand Lifeguard Exchange 1999-2000

By Shannon Svensen, Cal State, San Diego Coast North.

Since 1964, the CSLSA and the Auckland Surf Lifesaving Association have participated in a yearly exchange to enhance and promote professional lifeguarding standards and to continue the camaraderie between California and Auckland Lifeguards. Charlie Dall , Seasonal Lifeguard, City of Newport Beach, and I, Shannon Svensen, Seasonal LG II, Cal State San Diego Coast North, were selected as the California Delegates for 1999-2000.

While rescue techniques and philosophy are mainly the same as California, the overall structure of lifeguarding in New Zealand is completely different. The most populated beaches have Volunteer Surf Clubs, which house lifeguard operations, bunk rooms, kitchens, a bar, and competition equipment. Surf Clubs receive a small amount of money from local councils, but are largely funded by donations, sponsorship, and subscription fees for membership. During the peak 8 week season, 2-3 Regional Paid Guards are hired and distributed among the beaches to work on weekdays. Volunteer Patrols cover the weekends during the peak season, and all other weekends and holidays when patrols are needed throughout the year.

Each Surf Club has a “Nipper” program (Junior Lifeguards), and most clubs train enthusiastically for lifeguard competitions.

Rescue equipment is essentially the same, with Auckland clubs using the soft “Pete Peterson” style tubes. Different than many California beaches is the emphasis on Inflatable Rescue Boats (IRB's) for rescues. Most Auckland clubs have 2 IRB's out and ready during patrol hours, and use them for roughly 60-70% of their rescues. Big surf, jagged rocks, caves, and long distances from the tower make the IRB's an essential part of their operation.

Charlie and I were based at Muriwai, on the west coast of Auckland on the Tasman Sea. Muriwai is famous for it's expansive black sand beach and it's Gannett Colony. Muriwai also features the “longest rip current in the Southern Hemisphere.”

New Zealanders are known for their gracious hospitality. Muriwai “clubbies” were warm and welcoming as we discovered on our arrival at Muriwai on Christmas Eve, 1999. Christmas Day dawned bleak and cloudy, but the clean 8 foot surf soon made up for the weather. Muriwai Lifeguards Tim Jago and Bart Caldwell took us on the traditional Muriwai beach tour, which consists of jumping off the rocks into a churning surf cauldron, then swimming through an impossibly tiny cave. After we were all pinned to the ceiling of the cave a few times by the surge, Tim decided that perhaps he was right about the tide being too high, and we made it back out. The Muriwai cave adventure turned out to be just the first in a series of semi-harrowing experiences involving rock jumps and caves, as each west coast beach has their own “tour”.

Muriwai was also the busiest beach we helped patrol. One weekend late in January, Lunar Tides (the difference there is hundreds of feet between high and low tide) created such strong rips that our patrol made 41 rescues between 4:30 and 5:00 p.m.!

The Millennium New Year's Eve found Charlie and I joining the Auckland guards by volunteering to lifeguard overnight in IRB's on the bay. We escorted a Waka (Maori War Canoe) across to symbolize the Maoris' first crossing from their ancestral homeland, Hawaiiiki. It was THE New Year's event, with thousands of Aucklanders crowding the shores and paddling out on outriggers and kayaks to join the Waka. When the Waka landed, over 2,000 people joined in the Haka, a traditional Maori welcome dance/chant.

We toured and patrolled several other West Coast beaches, including the famous Piha, Bethell's and beautiful KareKare, where "The Piano" was filmed. Each West Coast beach featured warm hospitality from the "clubbies", a hike to an inland waterfall, and several rock jumps and cave swims.

We also toured the East Coast surf clubs, which face the South Pacific and are surfless except for the occasional swell. We went all the way down to the bottom of the North Island to the windy capital of Wellington to visit the national lifeguard headquarters, Surf New Zealand.

There were exciting times off of the beach as well. We spent a day on the set of Xena, Princess Warrior, which is filmed on the West Coast around Muriwai and Bethell's. We went out on the Harbour Master's boat for one of the races of the Louis Vuitton cup, and we toured Auckland from above as we rode in the Rescue Helicopter. A personal favorite was Blackwater Rafting through the Glow-Worm Caves of Waitomo.

The exchange was definitely the experience of a lifetime, one I would recommend to every California lifeguard. It was exciting to contribute to and learn from the international lifeguarding community, see old friends met on past California exchanges, and to make lifelong new friends.

For more information about the 1999/2000 California/New Zealand Lifeguard Exchange, complete with photos, bios, and narratives, please visit the 1999/2000 Exchange Web Site at: <http://www.geocities.com/ssvensen/>.

For information on applying for next year's exchange, visit the CSLSA web site at: <http://www.cslsa.org>

We are thankful for the financial support of the CSLSA, the CSLA, City of Newport Beach and the A.J. Summers Foundation of the Seal Beach Lifeguards. We would also like to thank Huntington City, Huntington State, Lake Mission Viejo, Oceanside and Cal State San Diego for contributing to the Exchange.

Filename: Svensen2
Directory: D:\personal\newdocs
Template: C:\WINDOWS\Application
Data\Microsoft\Templates\Normal.dot
Title: Rock jumps, cave swims and glow-worms...all in a day's
work for the average New Zealand lifeguard
Subject:
Author: Rincon Middle School
Keywords:
Comments:
Creation Date: 6/8/00 11:09 AM
Change Number: 3
Last Saved On: 8/1/00 7:34 AM
Last Saved By: Eric W. Sandy
Total Editing Time: 2 Minutes
Last Printed On: 9/14/00 10:38 PM
As of Last Complete Printing
Number of Pages: 2
Number of Words: 798 (approx.)
Number of Characters: 4,554 (approx.)