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NZ Mountain Safety Council response to the Federated Mountain Clubs of NZ December 2011 Bulletin article:

'Fording for Everyone' Brian Wilkins goes wading through rivers and fording literature.

INTRODUCTION:

The New Zealand Mountain Safety Council (MSC) was invited to consider the recent article discussing river crossing techniques published by the Federated Mountain Clubs of New Zealand (FMC) in the December 2011 edition of their publication 'The Bulletin'.

The statement of response below has been developed through consultation with the MSC Bushcraft Technical Advisory Committee and approved for distribution.

NZ MOUNTAIN SAFETY COUNCIL STATEMENT OF RESPONSE:

MSC is a national organisation with a mandate from our member organisations to encourage safe participation in land-based outdoor activities. River safety is an integral part of our outdoor safety training, education and awareness activity.

The 'mutual support technique' of river crossing is promoted in a variety of MSC publications including the Bushcraft Manual and the River Safety DVD and handbook. MSC also provides a river safety training opportunity for the general public as well as maintaining instructor proficiency.

MSC's decision to recommend the 'mutual support method' is the result of thorough testing of many of the most popular river crossing methods across the world, including techniques from New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Scandinavia and the United States to determine which system was the most suitable for New Zealand's conditions.

Actual trials of many known river crossing methods (including the use of ropes) were undertaken by outdoors experts. Participants in this forum included representatives from the New Zealand Police, Search and Rescue agencies, New Zealand Alpine Club and Federated Mountain Clubs.

“It was concluded that ropes can give people a false impression of their abilities, and can tempt people to try unsafe conditions,” said Ray Goldring, Convener of the New Zealand MSC Bushcraft Technical Advisory Committee.

“Using a rope as a crossing aid in rivers can be dangerous. Few people are sufficiently skilled to use them safely,” added Mr Goldring.

The mutual support method is only part of the MSC River Safety course, where course content also includes river dynamics and the decision making process in deciding whether it is safe to cross or not. Since introducing the current mutual support method there have been no known deaths reported using this method.

MSC will always promote the safest and most up to date methods/information in all of its disciplines for safety in land-based activities. This is achieved by constant research, consultation and development.

Chris Owens

Programme Manager – Bushcraft & Risk Management

04 385 7162 x223

0274 898 866

chris.owens@mountainsafety.org.nz