



NELSON SPELEOLOGICAL GROUP

P.O. Box 795
NELSON

23rd July 2009

Submission.

“Draft Partial Review Kahurangi National Park Management Plan”

Dear Sir or Madam,

Cavers from all over New Zealand have enjoyed what is the best caving in the country in Kahurangi National Park. Overseas cavers come from the other side of the world to enjoy the best of what we have.

We as a Club and as a body of cavers Locally, Nationally, and Internationally have only one concern with the draft Partial Review although it has several parts.

Air access

Ref:

4.2.A.7d & Map G

1. The Number of Expeditions allocated.
2. The NO fly zones.
3. Change of wording.
4. Cost / Price.
5. Concessions and Helicopter operators.

Number of trips allocated:

We have been allocated twelve trips in any one-year.

It is our understanding that this is twelve expeditions in one year, which may involve up to five landings in a three-hour period and five landings in a further three-hour period. This does not include the small trip allocation using the transport provider's concession.

Twelve Expeditions may sound like a reasonable amount at the present but I don't believe there has been any future proofing of this figure. By this I mean, the growth of Caving and the possibility of a new discovery.

Growth of Caving:

Our Club and many like the Nelson Speleological Group are experiencing healthy growth; this may be due to the awareness in the community of Cavers and Caving in general. Whatever the reason our membership has increased by approximately 15%. It may be reasonable to assume that we may require 15% more air access opportunities.

We believe once a figure is in the "Management Plan" that it would be very hard to change it.

It is important to realise that we are not just talking about a few local Cavers we are talking about the International caving community at large. Tourism is a big earner for this country and overseas Cavers spend a lot of money to ensure that their Caving and Holiday in New Zealand go well.

The growth of commercial caving albeit under the education banner is also a factor to consider. This is of concern as there are no separate allowances for this type of commercial caving and the twelve allocations could be used up quickly by these operators.

New Discovery:

Twelve Expeditions per year may sound reasonable at the moment but although the Caving membership is growing the discovery of new caves and cave system has slowed and in fact there has not been any caves of expedition size discovered for a long time. This could all change, and if it does with the discovery of a new system then a lot more than twelve Expedition flights may be required.

New caves bring people out of the woodwork, cavers that once were cavers become cavers again, and interest from overseas increases also.

The No fly zones:

These remote fly zones are remote isolated areas but it is for just these reasons that air access is crucial and extremely important for cavers.

Air access is vital for a caving group to explore these remote-caving areas.

The activity of caving relies heavily on helicopter flights into these remote caving zones as much heavy gear and equipment is often required.

Cavers often organize a flight of equipment and walk in to the caving area.

The caving areas concerned are:

Mt Owen caving area.

Mt Arthur caving area.

Garibaldi caving area.

Oparara basin caving area.

As the Management Plan stands the Arthur caving area does support air access as do the Garibaldi and Oparara basin areas although further consultation regarding these prime-caving areas is sort.

Mt Owen:

Location of New Zealand's longest cave:

Mt Owen is a loose name for the whole area, in fact it is called the Merino mountains. Consultation with the department regarding some slight boundary changes is sort. Upper Castle basin is presently a No fly caving area. **This needs to change.**

Dogface flat also is a NO fly caving area. **This needs to change.**

Rolling river junction picnic area, is often used by expeditions as a landing area to support caving areas, **This needs to change.**

Cavers are:

Explorers, Surveyors, Geologists, Photographers, Entomologists, Hydrologists, Paleontologists, Conservationists, and also have many other interests related to caving.

Suggestions:

If DoC must have a set figure regarding the number of Expedition trips, then it must be higher. If the Department does not intend to hinder recreational activities (We believe this is not the intention) now and in the years to come then a figure of double this amount would avoid this.

If the Department must have a set figure of twelve Expeditions, then a process of future proofing must be included in the Management Plan. With each review there must be an open submission process and that it would be acknowledged in the "Plan" that an increase in trips would be expected.

In the event of new discoveries and after the twelve allocated expeditions have been used then there must be a process to increase the expedition allocation. This may be as a "one off" request for a concession taken on its merits at the time. Flexibility is important here.

A change of wording:

4.2.A.7d

First paragraph.

"Twelve caving *expeditions* supported by helicopter landings have been allocated in any one-year.....

and

Second paragraph.

"Opportunities for caving *expeditions* supported by helicopter landings will be allocated in consultation with the New Zealand Speleological Society. (Delete the rest of the paragraph)

Third paragraph.

Individuals or groups organising a caving *expedition* involving helicopter landings need...

We feel this wording change is important as individuals doing a small cave trip could take up some of the twelve-expedition trip allocation not worthy of expedition status.

We also feel that the “National Speleo watch dog” “The New Zealand Speleological Society” should administer and allocate the twelve expedition concessions. This will ensure that only those expeditions that abide by the NZSS’s code of conduct will be allocated these very special caving concessions.

Cost:

There is a concern that there will be a cost involved with this new system of air access concessions. It is important that this cost be kept to a minimum so as not to hinder the recreational use of the park. A figure of \$250.00 per concession has been murmured. This figure is unacceptable. If the department wishes to place restrictions on air access in this way then the department should pay the extra administration costs. There is no benefit to park users in the implementing of this system. It is my understanding that DoC has received no written complaints regarding the “Natural quite values” noted in **4.2.A.4**. We would like to see the amount to be charged written into this “Management Plan” so that submissions may be placed on this subject also.

Concessions and Helicopter operators:

Short flights and back flights.

It is already a problem in some parts of the country that if a request for a short flight is asked for, helicopter companies are just not interested. This is because they are limited to only a certain number of landings to make their money in one year. Helicopter companies must take the jobs that they are in the air for the longest time to make their businesses viable. Many Caving trips (Not expeditions) typically are short flight times, and as the allocation of each operator runs low the willingness to fly these short flights is decreased. Back flights are often used. (A back flight is when an operator drops off a fisherman and on his way back, lands briefly to collect a net load of caving equipment) This is of concern not only to cavers but also to many other park users as this is an inexpensive way of exiting equipment, rubbish and personnel from the park. The length of time the aircraft is in the air is only slightly longer than the original flight but the operator has been penalised for landing. These back flights have been invaluable to cavers over the years. Helicopter operators or their clients should not be penalised for this service.

To summarise:

Cavers need unlimited access to the known caving areas and historically used landing sites. Cavers need more than twelve Expedition trips per year especially in the event of new cave systems found. Recreational activities of cavers must not be hindered either by the unavailability of helicopter access nor by cost.

Regards
Andrew Smith
President
Nelson Speleological Group