

Bus driver has a lucky escape

HANGATIKI resident Graeme Plenderleith is thanking his lucky stars.

The Dobson Motors school bus driver was travelling south from Te Kuiti to pick up his bus in Benneydale just after 7am on Thursday when heavy rain and wind brought part of a tree down on to his car.

The impact buckled the left front door pillar of the small Toyota Passo hatchback, shattered the windscreen, smashed both wing mirrors and broke the driver's side headlight.

Fortunately Mr Plenderleith was unhurt and he is thankful he wasn't driving a busload of children at the time.

The branches fell across Waitete Rd from the passenger side of the car a few metres past the access road to the Mangaokewa Scenic Reserve.

"I had my lights on because it was dark when suddenly there are branches and foliage crashing across the windscreen," says Mr Plenderleith.

"I hit the brakes and veered into the centre of the road trying to avoid the thickest branches."

He checked the car for damage and was about to

drive off when he had two more close calls.

BAFFLED

He is baffled by the drivers of two vehicles that passed him while he was still stopped in the centre of the road. The first was travelling towards him into Te Kuiti.

"I flashed my lights to warn him of the hazard and got out to signal him to slow down, but he just carried straight on through," he says.

"I had no sooner got back into the car, when a driver from behind me shot through the branches on my inside. The trailer he was towing got the wobbles, but he didn't slow down."

When Mr Plenderleith carried on, he came across the car and trailer.

"The driver had stopped to check his vehicle having driven through the foliage on my inside, so I asked him why he hadn't slowed down when he saw me," he says.

"But all I got was a barrage of swear words because I had stopped in the middle of the road.

"Not that I had a choice."

"I had no sooner got back into the car, when a driver from behind me shot through the branches on my inside. The trailer he was towing got the wobbles, but he didn't slow down."



LUCKY ESCAPE: Dobson Motors school bus driver Graeme Plenderleith of Hangatiki had a lucky escape when a tree fell on his car as he was driving to do his Benneydale run on Thursday morning.

SH3 back to one lane

STATE Highway 3 has been reduced to a single lane south of Mahoenui following a rock fall on Wednesday at the same spot a New Plymouth woman was killed by a falling boulder three months ago (*Waitomo News*, April 1).

Explosives were used to clear more than 250 tonnes of rock from the Mangaotaki Bluffs and stabilise the cliff face. after Joy Thompson (74) died on March 28. when a boulder struck the car in which she was a passenger.

The general manager of the company that carried out the work was "comfortable the hazards we have removed will prevent any further risk of rock fall" and New Zealand Transport Agency's highway manager Kaye Clark said: "We are now satisfied the road is clear of danger." (*Waitomo News*, May 6).

Despite these assurances a car carrying three adults and a child was struck by a large slab of rock that bounced over a concrete safety wall in exactly the same place on Wednesday.

Front seat passenger Graeme Norris of Manaia is reported to have said in other media that he was about to say – "This is where that woman was killed" – when a 2m X 1m slab of rock slammed into the northbound SUV at 10am, bursting a tyre and damaging the

rear suspension.

It happened so quickly the driver was unable to avoid the rocks.

BACK TO ONE LANE

Since the incident, SH3 has been reduced to one lane for further rock removal and stabilisation work.

A Stop/Go is in place during daylight hours with temporary traffic signals operating at night until further notice, and an additional fence has been installed above the existing safety barrier.

Ms Clark says NZTA is sympathetic to the Taranaki travellers' experience on Wednesday.

She says a \$ million steel mesh, to be designed, will be installed over the rock face to protect motorists from further rock falls.

The work is scheduled to start in the next couple of months. In the meantime, the rock face is being constantly monitored.

"The rock fall (on Wednesday) could have been far worse," says Ms Clark.

"While some rocks bounced over the barrier, the safety fence was effective in trapping other falling rocks."

She urges motorists to "keep their wits about them and drive to the conditions as unexpected things can happen anytime on the roads".



OTOROHANGA COLLEGE

Honour Before Honours
Ko te mana mo mua i te whakamana

School of choice
celebrates significant success

School News

Footloose exploded onto the Ōtorohanga College stage last week. Fifty students took up the challenge to star in the college's bi-annual musical production. The cast's talents were showcased through a range of roles, from the smooth dance moves of Ren (Mason Reedy) to the dulcet tones of Ariel (Talesha Waretini), the hilarious antics of Willard (Thomas Anglesey) and the rebellious demeanour of Chuck (Kiso Eti). Of particular note was the convincing performance by Reverend Moore (Antonio Rata), Vi Moore (Nicki Hayes) and Rusty (Arahina Noah-Maaka). The complex choreography for the energetic group dances were pieced together by Melissa O'Brien and executed with precision and enthusiasm by cast members of all ages. Crowd favourites Lyle (Sharez Tumai) and Travis (Ozzie Tapara) entertained with their antics and outstanding musical ability. Directors Kristen Joyes and Fiona Raine have worked with the cast for three months and have been extremely proud of the commitment, maturity and development the students have shown. The positive attitudes and willingness to improve has been rewarded with the response from engaged and appreciative audiences, tallying over 1000 people. The production is made possible by Ōtorohanga College staff and the community who support the students to excel.



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