

\$2m rock project is complete

THE \$2.5 million project to make safe a section of the Mangaotaki Bluffs on SH3 after a woman was killed by a falling rock is finished almost a year to the date..

Heather Thompson (74) of New Plymouth died in March, 2014 when boulders crushed the car she was travelling in, south of Piopio. (*Waitomo News*, April 1 2014)

Her sister, who was driving, escaped with minor injuries.

At the time New Zealand Transport Agency's (NZTA) regional performance manager Karen Boyt said she was confident contractors had done all they could to prevent the deadly rock fall.

Monthly inspections of the bluffs'

rock face are carried out during periods of stormy weather and high rainfall, while high-risk areas are also re-inspected after heavy rain.

STEEL NET

In September, NZTA began work placing a 1600sq m steel net over a section of the bluffs above SH3 where Mrs Thompson was killed.

While clearing loose material and securing the steel mesh to the cliff face using 500 rock anchors, a section of road was reduced to one lane.

Part of the project involved planting native seeds and grass on the lower cliff face with hydro-soil equipment to further stabilise the site.

TO P3



ANCHORED: After seven months, the \$2.5 million New Zealand Transport Agency project to secure a section of the Mangaotaki Bluffs on SH3 is finished.

Picture perfect



PHOTO OP: Shearing great David Fagan casts an expert eye over the job Waitomo community development co-ordinator Donna Macdonald is making of 'shearing' the Buy Kiwi Made store's sheep. As The Great NZ Muster organiser Mrs Macdonald hope visitors to the April 11 event will take the opportunity to have their photo taken in the booth as a lasting memory of their trip to Te Kuiti. STORY P3

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\$2m project done

FROM P1

Ms Boyt says the rock anchors and steel net is a long-term solution to stabilising the area.

"The safety of motorists on this stretch of road is of the utmost importance to the transport agency," she says.

"We continually assess our highway network to identify and mitigate safety risks, and we adhere to internationally recognised rock fall safety guidelines."

MONITORING TO CONTINUE

Ms Boyt says NZTA will continue to monitor other sections of SH3 for potential rock fall risks.

"However, the nature of New Zealand's challenging geography means that the risks of rock falls and other natural events can never be completely eliminated."

Further plans include working with geotechnical experts to map high risk areas from south of Te Kuiti to Mokau.

"This assessment will essentially map key problem areas so we can identify any further need for stabilisation or protection work and ensure we are increasingly aware of changes," says Ms Boyt.

The road has now been reopened to two lanes.

FEEDBACK WANTED

Motorists travelling between the Awakino Gorge and Mt Messenger on SH3 are being encouraged to share their opinions of the route.

NZTA is investigating ways to increase safety and efficiency in the area as part of the Government's \$212 million Accelerated Regional Rooding Package.

This section of SH3, which is the main route between New Plymouth and Hamilton, travels through rough terrain, is windy and narrow and prone to rock falls and slips.

NZTA Waikato highways manager Kaye Clark says the investigation will focus on improving safety, freight efficiency and the resilience of the route.

The possibility of increasing the number of passing opportunities will also be looked at.

An online feedback form allows people to have their say on what is important to them.

"We want to hear from the public as we start to identify the challenges and possible improvements along this stretch of highway," says Ms Clark.

"We are encouraging people to tell us how they use this corridor, their thoughts on key areas and how we could consider improving it."

"The specific projects and work to be undertaken will depend on our investigation's findings."

"Feedback received from the community will help develop the potential safety and efficiency improvements."

Submissions close on Monday, April 13 at 5pm.

For more information or to provide feedback, visit the website - nzta.govt.nz/awakino

Photo op for Muster visitors

TE KUITI businesswoman Kim Fagan is focused on capturing the images of visitors to The Great NZ Muster on April 11.

She's built a photo booth at her Te Kumi Rd business - Buy Kiwi Made - that looks like a shearing stand where people can have their picture taken pretending to shear a sheep. She thinks it will be very popular.

"The muster attracts thousands of people into Te Kuiti - the Shearing Capital of the World - every year and that's fantastic, but I think we take for granted the impact our rural lifestyle has on international and urban visitors," she says.

"Many of them have no idea what shearing is and all they want to do is touch a sheep."

"We wanted to fuel that interest at our Te Kumi Rd 'Buy Kiwi-made' store."

While regulations prevented Ms Fagan from having a live sheep in the store, she decided to do the next best thing and set up a photo opportunity for tourists in a mock shearing stand with a model sheep.

Her father, Robin Fagan pulled a stand out of an old woolshed, her uncle David Fagan gave her an old handpiece, her mother Carol pulled apart the dog's sheepskin bed to create the 'sheep' and they cobbled together other props such as a pair of shearer's moccasins.

"It looks very authentic and visitors to Buy Kiwi Made already just love posing for a shearing photo to commemorate their trip to the North King Country," she says.

"I think it will be a great hit at the muster too."

More on The Great NZ Muster P12.

IN BRIEF

Chiefs ticket winners

CONGRATULATIONS to Super Rugby Chiefs supporters Sam Brooks (Piopio), Aroha Atutahi (Te Kuiti) and Carlene Passau (Oparau). They were the lucky recipients of a double pass to the seventh round Investec fixture against the Cheetahs at the Waikato Stadium in Hamilton on Saturday, thanks to the Waitomo News and the Chiefs. The rugby fanatics were able to correctly name the McKenzie brothers - Marty and Damien - who feature in the Chiefs squad.

Volunteer awards

NOMINATIONS are open for the annual Volunteering Waikato awards which recognise individuals and groups who make a difference in communities throughout the Waikato region. Any community organisation can make a nomination, and there is separate categories for youth volunteers and volunteer teams such as project teams. Nominations close on April 13. For more information visit the website - volunteeringwaikato.org.nz

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