

# Daring cliff rescue saves youth



Geraldton SES Vertical Rescue Team members Michael Standley and Heiner Schmidt were confronted by a treacherous and unstable cliff face. Photos courtesy of Ashlee Lancaster.

Rescuers of a teenager who fell almost 40 metres down a jagged cliff face at Ellendale Pool, were amazed that he was not critically injured or even killed.

The boy had been on an overnight camping trip at the popular picnic and recreational area 45 kilometres south of Geraldton when he decided to explore a cave on the cliff face.

At a height of approximately 60 metres he lost his footing after being stung by bees.

Falling down the limestone cliff wall, he came to rest some 20 metres from the base.

While some friends climbed down to assist the injured boy, others from the camping group raised the alarm and called triple zero for emergency assistance.

Police, St John Ambulance and career firefighters from Geraldton Fire and Rescue Service were first on the scene, identifying the need for the Geraldton State Emergency Service (SES) Vertical Rescue Team (VRT) and the RAC Rescue helicopter to attend the incident.

Geraldton SES Deputy Unit Manager Michael Standley said when they arrived a St John Ambulance paramedic who had been ferried across the water, had managed to climb up to the boy and commence medical assistance.

Michael and his fellow SES VRT member Heiner Schmidt were confronted with an unstable cliff face that would test their vertical rescue training.

“Shale and rubble from the cliff face were falling down and the ground was very treacherous with loose clay that crumbled under your feet as you moved,” Michael said.

The situation required Michael and Heiner to abseil down the cliff 20 metres away from the injured teen to prevent rocks falling, then traverse across to where he lay on a small ledge.

The patient was placed on a stretcher and carefully lowered to the cliff base.

He was then carried up river to an area where the RAC Rescue helicopter could safely conduct winch operations.

## Rescuers of a teenager who fell almost 40 metres down a jagged cliff face at Ellendale Pool, were amazed that he was not critically injured or even killed.

“He was very lucky to be alive and very lucky to land where he did,” Michael said.

“Looking at the distance the boy fell and where he ended up, if he had gone just a little bit further forward he could well have landed on sharp rocks.”

RAC Rescue Pilot Mick Perron explained that a direct rescue of the boy from the cliff face was not possible.

“After aerial surveillance of the scene this option was simply considered too risky,” Mick said.

“Although the RAC Rescue helicopter has the capability to winch a stretcher, this is preferably done from a solid ground environment, which was not the case with the boy on the ledge.

“Through interagency consultation we determined the safest way to conduct the task would be to utilise the skills of SES VRT roping teams onsite and place the patient on a stretcher while still on the cliff face.”

Mick said that winch team member Critical Care Paramedic Mike Leahy was lowered from the chopper to the foot of the cliff.

“When the teenager was delivered to Mike by the SES VRT he began treatment and prepared him for winching up to the helicopter,” he said.

“Although this was a delicate operation, it was safely achieved.”

The boy was then flown to nearby Geraldton Regional Hospital.

Despite his fall, the teenager suffered relatively minor injuries.

Michael said the rescue went very smoothly and exactly like it should have.

“We had to improvise a little with the difficult surface conditions, but everyone worked well together,” Michael said.

“It went to plan and was right in line with our training.”

