

Five trampers found

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Staff reporters

A WOMAN and four children missing in Te Urewera for two nights were found alive and well yesterday.

Eastern Bay area commander Kevin Taylor addressed media at 4.15pm at the Tuhoe headquarters in Taneatua, Te Kura Whare, and announced the children, aged between four and nine, and the woman had been found about 30 minutes earlier, at 3.45pm.

He said rescuers were in the process of winching the woman and children from a riverbed after they had dropped down from an un-named track in the middle of the search area.

"The scenario was exactly what LandSAR (Search and Rescue New Zealand) had predicted in that they dropped down onto the river bed. They are all alive and we believe at this stage that their conditions are okay."

Police launched the search and rescue operation after the group was reported overdue on Wednesday from a walk in the Otamatuna Ridge area, near Waimana. They had been dropped off just after 1pm on Tuesday for a walk that should have taken one to two hours to complete.

Mr Taylor said the terrain was "rugged and hard to search".
"It is very steep and covered in a

canopy of forest."

The woman with the children was not their mother but understood to be a relative.

Mr Taylor said the mother of some of the children had been travelling from Perth and was driving from Auckland to Waimana when news broke that the group had been found.

Earlier in the day four rows of cars were parked at the Lions Hut, the search headquarters, at the southern end of Matahi Valley Road.

Police and search and rescue staff were present and family members waited or helped with the rescue. They were not interested in talking to media.

Two searchers, a man and woman, both declined to give an update at about 3pm. When asked about why it took family members so long to notify the police, Mr Taylor said he could not answer that question because their investigations had focused on the period from when they were told the group was missing.

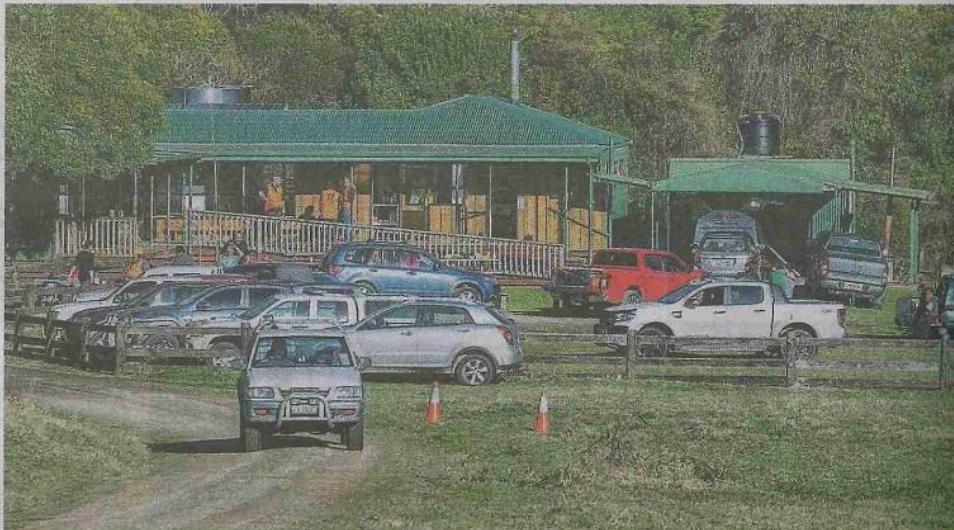
"As soon as we found out we launched a major search and we carried out that search throughout the night and that same search has carried on today with 11 teams in the bush.

"Our focus, since we became aware, has been on searching for the group and we have got an excellent result so now



GOOD RESULT: Eastern Bay area commander Kevin Taylor announces the woman and four children missing in Te Urewera have been found. Photo Troy Baker D3984-08

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WAITING, WATCHING: The scene yesterday at the Lions Hut near Waimana as rescuers scoured the surrounding area for a woman and four children missing in Te Urewera. D3983-10

Missing trampers safe and well

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we can go and ask other questions."

Mr Taylor said the plan was to transport the woman and children to the Lion's Hut after they were winched from the riverbed, where they would receive medical attention from ambulance officers.

He said he wanted to acknowledge the

efforts of all of the search teams, including LandSAR volunteers and police staff, as well as Tuhoe people who provided excellent support throughout the operation.

"While we were fully prepared to keep searching, through the night if needed, all are relieved and thankful that the group won't be having to endure a third cold night in the bush."