

Class B Accident Report

Hamilton 141

Fatality

Woodstock, Upper Waimakariri River
on 31 October 2004.

KEEPING YOUR SEA SAFE FOR LIFE



Maritime Safety

MARITIME SAFETY AUTHORITY OF NEW ZEALAND
Kia Maanu Kia Ora



REPORT NO: 04 1141

UNNAMED – GROUNDING RESULTING IN A FATALITY

After two days hunting in the upper Waimakariri River area, two hunters and the Owner/Driver of the jet boat were returning down stream to the launching area. When they reached the drop off area the Skipper decided the river had dropped too much to stop in that particular position. He turned the vessel back out into the main flow where the steering jammed. The vessel then drifted at speed down river and came into contact with the rocky river's edge three times before the crew were able to beach the vessel. During this time the Skipper suffered a heart attack and died after being helicopter evacuated from the area.



Details of Vessel, Owner & Management, Classification, Navigational Equipment, Manning & Crew:

| | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Name of Vessel: | <i>Unnamed Hamilton 141</i> |
| Vessel Type: | Commercial jet boat |
| Port of Registry: | N/A |
| Flag: | N/A |
| MSA No.: | 128570 |
| Construction Material: | Aluminium |
| Length Overall (m): | 4.4 |
| Propulsion: | Leyland P76 V8 engine, via a Hamilton 773 jet unit. |
| Last SOP audit | 26/11/03. no corrective actions required. SOP # JO249 |
| Accident Investigator: | Domonic Venz/Jeff Horne |

- **Owner Details**
Canterbury Fishing Adventures of Christchurch.

- **SOP Certificate**
The boat had a Certificate of Compliance issued 9 October 2002. The boat was not operating commercially at this time.

- **Driver Details**
The Driver, aged 69, and from Christchurch, had 40 years jet boating and manufacturing experience. He had driven race and sprint jet boats around the world and had trained drivers in Cambodia, Borneo, Papua New Guinea and Raratonga.

- **River Flow Details**

The nearest Environment Canterbury (E Can) river level monitoring station is located at the Waimakariri Gorge. E Can readings show that the river flow peaked at this station at 1100 hours Saturday 30 October. The jet boat departed in the early afternoon that day. When they returned to the same area at about 1230 hours on Sunday 31st October, the river had dropped approximately 14%.

NARRATIVE

At 1100 hours New Zealand Standard Time, Saturday 30 October 2004, the Driver/Owner and two friends departed Christchurch by road towing a jet boat, bound for a launching area on the Waimakariri River near Woodstock. They arrived at Woodstock and loaded the boat with gear. The Driver and one friend boarded the boat while Friend 2 launched them and parked the vehicle. He proceeded down to a prearranged backwater for pick-up. As he got there the Driver indicated for him to go up river about 50 metres. He did this and was picked up from the riverbank.

The Driver then boated upstream and past the Claudius Rapid. He stopped at a hut and unloaded their gear. The two friends then went on foot for a hunt while the Driver stayed at the camp area.

The Driver was communicating with the two friends using a walkie-talkie and was advised that they had shot a deer and were heading back. The Driver departed the camp and picked them up about 45 minutes after sunset and took them back to the hut. They had dinner and went to bed at about 2300 hours.

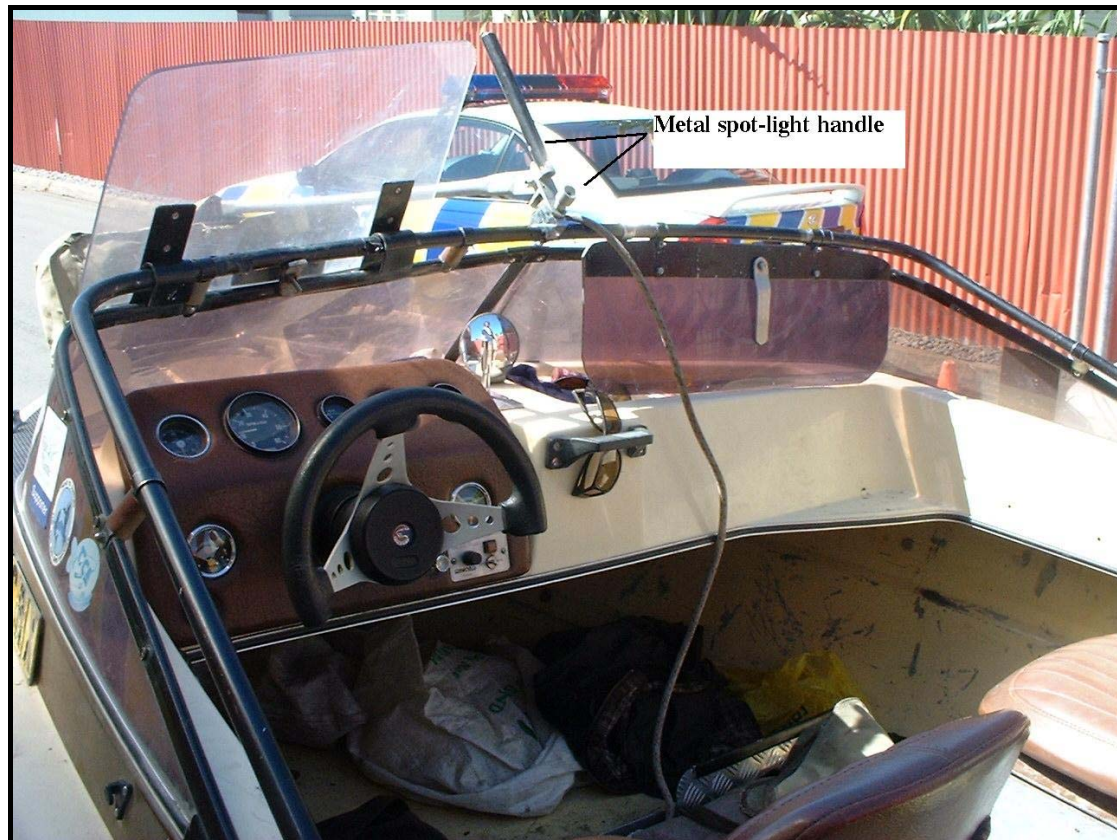
On the morning of Sunday 31 October 2004, at about 0930 hours, the driver and the two friends set off on the river to the top end of the Oxford Hunting Block. On arrival, the driver waited whilst the two friends went hunting.

At about 1030 hours, the driver boated downstream with the two friends to the camp where the gear was packed up and they departed at about 1205 hours. They boated back downstream towards the launching area. They stopped briefly on the way down to look at some deer sign on the rivers edge. At about 1230 hours, they reached the launching area and the Driver slowed the boat and was off the plane. He approached a backwater, positioned to port of the boat, but decided it was too shallow and turned to starboard in an attempt to head back upstream to go to a more suitable drop off spot.

As the Driver attempted to turn the vessel he remarked that he had no reverse. Friend 1 who was sitting in a moulded seat on the forward edge of the engine hatch leant aft and lifted the hatch over the steering and reverse bucket controls. He wiggled the reverse bucket lever, which moved freely. He yelled this out to the Driver but he still did not have control of the boat and was wrenching the steering wheel to try and free the steering. At this stage the boat struck the large rocky outcrops at the river's edge. Friend 1 leant out over the stern of the boat while Friend 2 held his feet and attempted to move the steering nozzle but was unable to and returned to inside the boat.

The vessel then struck the rocky river's edge again and Friend 2 tried to grab a bush but was unsuccessful. He then attempted to fend off the rocks using a wooden oar. The boat made heavy contact with the rocky outcrop on the river's edge, and he thought the handle end of the paddle had hit the Driver in the chest/ribs area. Friend 2 did not witness any contact between the handle end of the paddle and the Driver but was told about this later by Friend 1. The Driver had told Friend 1 that this

might have happened shortly before the Driver was thrown bodily towards the centre of the windscreen area, where he is thought to have impacted on the metal handle of the spot-light control.



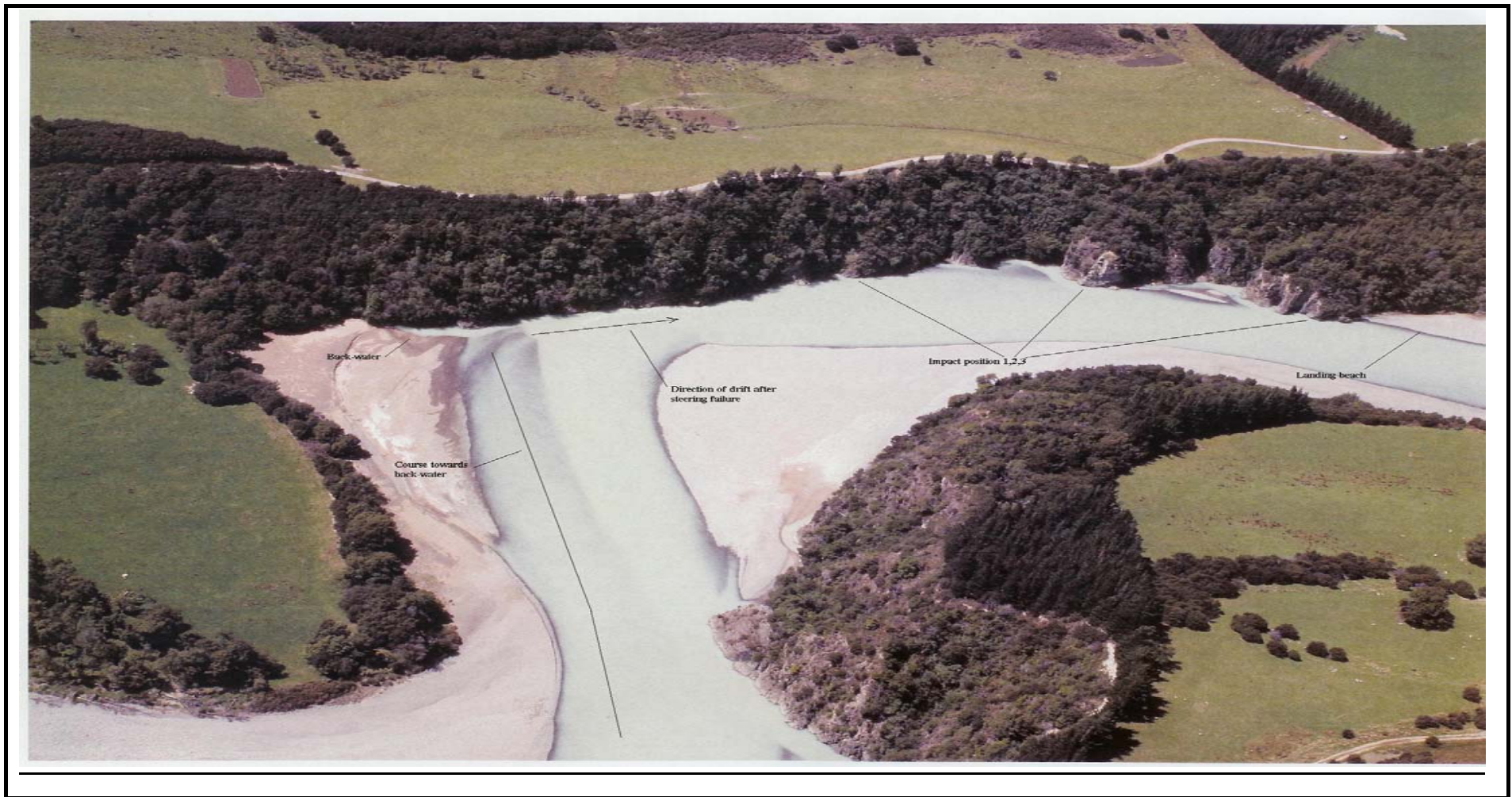
Both friends then paddled as the boat came clear of the rocks and went towards a beach.

Friend 1 untied the anchor and Friend 2 jumped over board near the beach with the anchor and rope attached to the boat. He pulled the boat in and secured the anchor to the beach. At this point the Driver had slumped back down into his seat and was looking ashen faced. The two friends saw clearly that he was very sick, so Friend 2 decided to climb up through the bush and run back to the vehicle to get the cell phone and call for help. While he was away Friend 1 made the Driver comfortable as he could in the seat, he was unconscious by this time.

He flagged down a passing jet boat who then went down stream to get cell phone coverage and call for help.

At 1320 hours the rescue helicopter arrived on the scene and the medics attempted to stabilise the Driver. At 1350 hours, he was evacuated by helicopter but died of a heart attack on board before arrival at Christchurch Public Hospital.

The two friends with the assistance of a second boat put an oar in the steering nozzle and jerked it to one side freeing the stone. The boat was then returned to the trailer successfully.



Aerial photograph of Waimakariri River, taken 1400 hours on 1 November 2004. Shows track down over single fan, backwater and drift track down to beach area. River level had dropped further since accident time on 31 October 2004.

FINDINGS

The flow of the river had dropped which reduced the amount of water over the shingle area leading to the backwater.

A stone jammed the steering nozzle in the jet unit after crossing a shallow area of the river.

The provisional autopsy report states that the Driver suffered a heart attack, due to severe ischaemic heart disease with previous artery bypass grafts, complicated by a blow to the chest. The blow to the chest would not of itself be expected to be fatal.

All on board were at all times wearing lifejackets.

The Driver was a very experienced jet boat driver.

SAFETY RECOMMENDATIONS

Nil