

# WAITOMO NEWS

- Peter Chandler

After the generally long warm summer in Waitomo ( we were far enough North to avoid the Strong South Westerly winds brought about by the el Nino weather pattern) July saw a dramatic change to this -Rain! The low pressure systems coming our way , wer neither too far South or North, so repeatedly brought rain from the North West ahead of cold fronts, which were and are often followed by smaller ones till some relatively fine weather arrives.

From my perspective at Black Water Rafting this meant more days flooded out in July than we would normally expect in a year . Wednesday 1st July, closed all afternoon. Re open Friday Afternoon. The following Wednesday 9th July, rain sets in, as expected well and truly flooded out by morning. Guide- Willy Poulson, stashes all innertubes to avoid floodwaters. Water reaches amazing heights in Ruakuri carpark. Entire carparks plus picnic area underwater. Water peaks half way up Barbeque wall. The area was water blasted clean by Dept of conservation Staff, only to be covered again 2 days later.

We are again up and running on Tuesday 14th, though it seemed most visitors had thought up other activities than floating through flooding caves. These high water trips, involves 3 Guides per group of 12 clients and preferably all happy in water ( good swimmers) A great degree of technique to get the group safely past obstacles such as ducks( sumped passages would force us to cancell !) High water flow at main stream and eddy out above waterfall. Assembling 'Eel' chain and disassembling after Glow-worm float. Climbing down past tomo and floating rapids, the latter made easier with the

extreme flow. Avoiding sections of the lower cave where currents can take the unwary. and exiting the cave avoiding the rapids under the Walkway bridge. Then a relatively quick float down the Waitomo stream to the start point. A consolation of these high water days is warmer water temperatures. It is a great contrast to fine frosty weather and low water and cave water temperatures of around 9 degrees C The ultimate is high water combined with sunny day- not that uncommon recently.

On Wednesday the 15th we were flooded again, for two and a half days. Things have been back to normal since then ( except 11<sup>th</sup> August ) This meant something like a 25% drop in visitors for the Month making July our quietist month for the year, normally June and more recently May

As users of an active cave streamway, the variations in water levels is certainly part of the operation. There are many different routines for any point in the cave depending on this water level. Our maximum operating water levels were established over the Winter of 1991 and are often studied but have not increased- there are plenty of times when it is not the place to be let alone as a guide.

Thankfully as we dress the visitors for the cave, and there are very little in the way of cave modifications, there is very little to be damaged. It amounted to the lower part of the BWR 2 track surface - half round tree fern trunks being washed into the Slot entrance and some handrails coming off the old bridge in the Ruakuri Showcave, and the walkway bridge near the BWR 1 exit. Many roads in the area did not fare so well....