

Stranded trio 'lucky to survive'

by Lynne Bradshaw

THREE Easter Ross men who were left stranded overnight after their small boat capsized were very lucky not to have drowned or suffered from hypothermia, according to coxswain of the lifeboat crew who rescued them after a chance sighting.

Sandy McPhee, his son Joseph and friend Greg Sutherland had to swim to shore at Caslestering, which was cut off by high tides and sheer cliffs, and then camped overnight in low temperatures using their washed up gear.

The trio from Balintore was spotted at about 11am on Saturday by the crew of the Invergordon lifeboat who had been called out to help search for missing Tain woman Johanne MacLeod. She was traced safe and well near the town the following day.

The crew shouted to the men through a loudspeaker to ask if they had seen the woman, but instead it became clear the three were in need of rescue.

The chance rescue of the stranded men, who were taken back to Nigg slipway, was just one of four shouts the two local

lifeboats from Invergordon and Kessock were involved in within 12 dramatic hours on Saturday.

The drama began before 11am when the Invergordon lifeboat was asked to search the coastline from Nigg Ferry to Tarbet Ness Lighthouse by Portmahomack.

After spotting the men, crew members Bruce Rae and Neil Ross used an XP boat to pluck the men to safety.

The trio's 12ft fibreglass boat capsized and became damaged the previous evening when it was caught by two or three breaking waves. They swam 50 metres to shore, managed to set up camp and start a fire and were all in good health when they were rescued.

Coxswain Andrew Murray told the Journal: "They were extremely, extremely lucky as they could've drowned when the boat capsized as they had no life jackets on, they had no way of raising the alarm because their mobiles were in the water and were rendered useless and they could've suffered from hypothermia by staying overnight through the first week of November."

While the three men were still on board, the Invergordon life-

boat was then diverted to take over towing a stricken converted fishing boat which had been rescued by the Kessock lifeboat when it was at risk of running aground.

The Sharon Rose, now a pleasure craft, was making her way from Inverness to Fraserburgh when she lost all power around the tidal narrows at Chanony Point. The tide was ebbing fast at the time and the 30 tonne boat was being carried towards the beach at Chanony.

The three Kessock lifeboat crew members established a tow line to the casualty vessel - which had a young man and an older male on board - pulled her from the beach and began to tow her to Cromarty.

The line was later passed to the Invergordon lifeboat who took the Sharon Rose safely into harbour before dropping the three rescued men at Nigg.

The Kessock crew's second emergency call of the day came less than 12 hours later when at about 10.30pm several 999 calls were made reporting red flares in the Munchkny Bay area.

After three hours of searching the crew found nothing except an old chest of drawers and stool down.

Plants moved on to a flourishing future



●Floral delight... from left, Elsieph Lawson and Karen Thomson of HIE, and Charlotte Smith of BTCV.

A BLACK Isle conservation charity is in the process of moving plants and flowers to a new home to save them from being destroyed when construction work starts at a new university and college campus.

Local charity BTCV, who are based in Munchkny, is working with HIE to ensure garden plants from the site at Beecroft in Inverness continue to thrive elsewhere in the Highland capital.

The donated plants will be placed in a garden feature at New Craigs

Hospital, which the charity is helping residential patients to create. Volunteer development officer, Elsieph Lawson, who runs BTCV's Green Gym team, added: "We were thrilled and very grateful to receive the invitation from the team at Inverness Campus."

"We have collected some beautiful hydrangeas, pansies, lavender and some great stones which our Green Gym team will use to make a fantastic raised garden feature with the residential patients up at New Craigs

Hospital."

Karen Thomson, HIE's Inverness Campus team manager, said: "We wanted to give away the current plants at Beecroft so they don't go to waste when contractors start on site."

"Knowing of BTCV's community work, we decided to ask if they might like them and we're pleased they were keen to help themselves. It's great to know they are going to a worthy cause and a good new home."

BTCV is an international conservation charity which helps people enjoy

fresh air, take up exercise and socialise. HIE is developing Inverness Campus as a major new location for learning and research, business, sport and leisure in the Highland capital.

It will provide a base for Inverness College, UHI, the Scottish Agricultural College, Centre for Health Science phase 4, a training hotel and sports and community facilities. Construction is due to start on site early next year.

For more information about Inverness Campus, please visit www.invernesscampus.co.uk

Search team's 19 flights

A TOTAL of 19 separate flights were made by the pilot and observers of Highland Air Search, who were also tasked to help search for the missing Tain woman on Saturday morning.

The aerial searches, which involved five aircraft concentrated on the Tain Links, Tain Bombing Range, the Tarbat Ness Peninsula and Nigg Hill.

The Easter Ross charity, which offers its aerial search capabilities to the emergency services, was called out again by Tain police the following day to continue the search for Johanne MacDonalid. She was found near Tain Links shortly afterwards by a member of Dornoch Coastguard.

As a result of the search, HAS is now planning to hold a joint search exercise in the very near future with police dog handlers based at Tain.

In October, Highland Air Search was awarded a grant of £2,000 from



●Highland Air Search pilots made Sunday afternoon flights across the Tain and Nigg areas.

the Scottish Community Foundation - funded by the David and Averil Macdonald Charitable Fund - towards the cost of procuring a handheld thermal imaging camera, to be used from an aircraft, to assist with the detection of missing and vulnerable persons located in dense woodland and buildings.

As a registered charity in Scotland, Highland Air Search welcomes all donations which all donations which would be most needed to purchase essential search

and communications equipment and opportunities also exist for the corporate sponsorship of aircraft. Northern Constabulary had expressed concern for the wellbeing of 36-year-old Ms MacDonalid, who is described as vulnerable, after she was reported missing.

An extensive search was carried out in and around the Tain area and members of the public were asked to check out-houses or garages following fears she could be sleeping rough.

In a statement issued around 2pm on Sunday, police confirmed she had been found safe and well and thanked members of the public for their assistance in the search.

Two days later on Tuesday evening, police released a statement saying that Ms MacDonalid

had again gone missing, this time from Alnca, and had not been seen since late on Monday.

She was later traced safe and well in Alnca and the police thanked the public for their assistance.

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