

CASSIDY Round One (aka Whakawhero)

I was coming through Moerewa heading home from a day in Whangarei when I heard my callsign crackling through on the radio. It was Mita calling me to give them a hand. I knew that Ed was out and about today, quietly moonlighting away from his goat work, looking for poachers. We had been sniffing around the Utukura area for a while now. Over the last few years we had been given consistent word from various sources that the poaching of kukupa in there was rife...and had been for some years.

We had gone on a recce several weeks ago, going in from the forestry block, following horse tracks, and ended up looking down over the Waikerikeri Road catchment. We had spotted tracks coming in and out from that direction and tied them in with the the beaten path at the top of a ridge where a nice grove of kauri and miro led down on to a good north facing slope where there were good miro and plenty of sign left by the hunters of kuku. That's why Ed had checked out the end of Waikerikeri Road this day. He was spot on as usual. The beat up old Holden was parked several hundred metres up the track, off the road-end and edged into the manuka. Wheel tracks fresh-as.

Winding his way slowly up the track, Ed noted the fresh boot marks...going in but not coming out. With it being late in the day there was no time to go bush and look and listen for evidence so he decided to set up a vehicle check just to suss things out. He had called up Mita to help out, asking him to see if I was close enough to pitch in.

I stopped at the top of the hill at the west side of Okaihau, looking west over the Utukura catchment and with good radio comms was able to raise Ed on our simplex channel. He informed me that Mita was just setting up and waiting with his 4x4 down near the Waikerikeri Road junction. Ed had his own vehicle stashed up a driveway near a ford not far from the road-end. If this guy was coming out he would be boxed in once he drove past Ed's position.

Since it was a fairly narrow road I stayed put in my vehicle back at the junction waiting to come in behind Mita once they had the stop under way. I was also hoping to establish radio comms with base, but with no luck. Down here we were in a basin and the repeater was not being triggered by our radios. Besides that, it was now after 4.30, the time when everyone buggers off home and we had no after hours radio service. Cell phone coverage was crap as well, so we were pretty much on our own with no other backup.

At 5.30 we got the call..

"He's coming out...old gold Holden.. One man. Go Mita, go !"

I threw my truck into gear and boogied on up the road. I was half a minute behind Mita, and came around the corner to see his vehicle parked smack in the middle of the narrow road. Back about 20 metres was the Holden. I could hear the yelling even before I shut off the engine...

"Get the fuck off my road you fuckin arsholes!! Its my fuckin road. If you don't get out of the fuckin way I will ram my fucking way out !! Now get out of the fuckin way !!"

He was fair off his trolley !! Leaning out of the window and yelling, shaking his fist at Mita who was standing a metre or two away from him. He started to reverse just as Ed came down the road, stopping with his bullbars up against the rear of the holden.

Another tirade of abuse..

"Who the fuck do think you are ?? Get out of the way !!"

Mita was holding up his warrant and yelling at him that we were Rangers demanding he get out of the vehicle. The man promptly charged his car at Mita and ended up crunching his already munted grill up against the bullbar of Mita's truck.. Mita had done a nifty sidestep and

was now standing at the drivers door. The man had wound up the window and Mita had his warrant pressed up against the glass, yelling..

“Get out of the Vehicle.. Rangers !! Step out of the vehicle !!”

The man was yelling back..

“Fuck off you fuckin arsholes..!!”

They were like two dogs snarling at each other through a plate glass window. Quite pretty to watch really. With this snarling match going on Ed and I casually walked up, Ed reaching in through the rear door behind the man and quietly removing the .22 rifle lying between the front seats. Stashing it in his wagon.

I walked around to the front passenger door, opened it, held up my warrant and asked him to calm down or we would finish the talk back at the Police station. This seemed to have some effect and after another minute or two of verbal, most about his tangata whenua rights. He finally got out and proceeded to spend the next ten minutes venting his verbal abuse at me while Mita and Ed calmly and methodically searched his car.

On the floor in the front left of the vehicle was an old blue pack. Inside was a bloody plastic bag that reeked of fresh kukupa. In the bottom of the pack were several small feathers and down. All readily recognisable to me as kukupa.

The whole car was a veritable heap of crap! Rubbish everywhere, the rego on the windscreen was different to the plates and two years overdue, ditto the warrant of fitness.

Hopefully from me.. “...Whats your name?”

“Go fuck yourself you honky arsehole..!”

After another several goes at this he quietened down somewhat. Relaxing knowing that Ed & Mita had not turned up anything save the smelly pack and a few feathers.. feeling safe now.

“My names James Whakawhero and I work on the farm up the road.”

“Yeah right. So what do you do?”

“Bit of fencing, hunting possums. Just handyman work for the farmer.”

We spent the next hour searching up and down the edge of the road, down the bank, into the scrub, using torches in the gathering gloom. We were sure he had tossed the bird over the bonnet of his car as he had backed around the corner just before Ed drove up on his rear, stopping his retreat. Down below the road it was a mess of scrub, manuka, bracken fern, blackberry, all dropping down into the Waikerikeri stream. Great.

We found nothing. In the end, at about 6.30 I let him go. We could not hold him and we had no means of getting the Police here to arrest him. Not that they would have anything to arrest him on, except maybe for his heap of shit car. As he drove off I knew we would find he had sold us a pack of lies, but at least we had relieved him of his rifle. I would be looking at charging him with possession of feathers and a few other things if we could pin him down.

And so it was. Over the next week I tried all the avenues I could to find any sign of the person he had declared himself to be. The vehicle’s rego had long expired and came back to some nefarious address in Auckland that was two years old. I was becoming philosophical and ready to write him off.

It was a Thursday afternoon four weeks later.. I was sitting at my desk in the office at Kerikeri, when my phone rang. It was Mita. Excited, talking quickly as he does..

“Hey Ross.. I am at the Police station in town. Guess who I just spotted in the supermarket ? Our Mate from Waikerikeri..!”

“I’ve told the Police about our mate, and the sergeant and I are just waiting for him to come back to his car parked outside here by the station. You better get down here!”

By the time I got down to the supermarket, which was conveniently located next door to Kerikeri Police Station, our man had gone back to his car. I arrived just in time to hear him letting off a tirade of abuse at the sergeant, who promptly arrested him.

Back in the station we finally found out that his real name was Cassidy, and as the sergeant succinctly put to Mr Cassidy:

“Well son, if you had co-operated with these rangers a few weeks ago you would only be facing their charges. But since you abused them, and told them a pack of lies, you are now standing here with a whole bunch of our charges and their charges as well.”

“Oh yeah, and I have just pink stickered your car as well. You have a nice day now.”

We charged Cassidy with possession of wildlife (feathers), obstructing a ranger, threatening a ranger, and threatening a ranger with a vehicle. In the end he never made any of his Court appearances and was convicted and sentenced in his absence. Good to get a result, but I would really have preferred to have him before a Judge and a courtroom.

* * *

Copyright Ross Atkinson