



Beach Launching and Retrieval Safety Guidelines

Background

Our club members have privileged access through the locked gate at the Southern end of Muriwai Beach for the purpose of launching boats. This is by way of the issue of a limited number of keys to our club by Auckland Council and the allocation of these keys to individual club members.

Muriwai Beach is a challenging environment in which to launch and retrieve a boat. The beach is also used by members of the public for other recreational purposes, and our activities often take place in the same parts of the beach and ocean.

These guidelines are intended to be a reference for club members when launching and retrieving a boat off Muriwai Beach, particularly to maximise the safety of both club members and other beach users and to minimise the chance for harm to people or property.

These guidelines assume that the reader is a competent and experienced skipper in typical boating conditions, e.g. launching at a boat ramp or sheltered sandy beach and into sheltered waters. The items discussed in this document relate to the specific challenges of launching off Muriwai Beach into the surf. Any skipper who is not already highly experienced in typical boating conditions should not attempt to launch a boat off Muriwai Beach.

This document is a collection of knowledge and ideas from club members and is continually updated. If you have any suggestions for improvements to this document please contact the Committee at secretary.msfc@hotmail.com. The Committee and other experienced club members are also available to provide direct engagement with any club member who is seeking further advice or assistance.

Before leaving home (with your boat). Timing your launch.

Check the surf forecast. Useful surf forecasts include:

- <https://www.marineweather.co.nz/forecasts/muriwai>
- <https://magicseaweed.com/Muriwai-Beach-Surf-Report/4078/>
- <http://www.swellmap.com/surfing/new-zealand/muriwai-beach>
- <https://www.surf2surf.com/reports/muriwai> (includes a live streaming cam, but requires a paid subscription)

Surf forecasts are never perfectly accurate. It's important to identify whether the forecast is for a decrease or increase wave size and swell period. Surf forecasts can suggest the same wave size between two days, but may show a change in swell period. The change in swell period alone can be an indication of conditions changing from 'comfortably boat-able' to quite challenging.

Visit the beach and observe the conditions. This is best done either: (1) immediately before you intend launching, or (2) the day before at the same time of tide as you intend launching (e.g., if you're planning to go at 7am on Saturday, visit the beach at 6:30pm on Friday to observe the conditions).

When you observe the conditions keep in mind the forecast change according to the surf forecast. If it looks marginal and the forecast is for bigger waves or a longer swell period, you're probably best to find something else to do. Or if you're comfortable with the conditions you see, and the forecast is for a further improvement, then hurry up and get the boat ready.

Pick your tide. As a general rule at Muriwai, low is the most unpredictable tide to launch or retrieve, and at high tide the sand is usually soft enough to cause challenges.

Launching into an incoming tide and retrieving from an outgoing tide is ideal. This means that if needed you can unload the boat into shallow water and wait for the incoming tide to float it, and beach the boat on retrieval and wait for the outgoing tide to leave enough dry sand to get the car and trailer safely to the boat.

Typical challenges to be aware of at low tide include:

- The beach can be very flat, causing a long drive through shallow water to get deep enough to launch and float the boat. This is ok if the sand is hard.
- Corrugations in the sand and areas of wetness can signal soft sand. This can sometimes still be driven on but loss of traction or a vehicle sitting at idle can be enough to cause the tires to sink in and become stuck.
- A sand bar can form off the beach which causes heavily breaking waves concentrated in shallow water. In extreme circumstances this can be too shallow to float a boat over, and may often prevent the outboard being lowered enough to apply full power and get the boat on the plane.

Warm up the motor. This particularly applies to carburetted 2 stroke engines. Driving through the surf often requires fast acceleration and the stutter or stall from a cold engine can leave the boat in a dangerous situation.

Arriving at the beach and preparing to launch.

Going through the gate. Do not let another vehicle or boat through the gate behind you. Failure to observe this rule may result in the club's access to the gate being taken away by Auckland Council, and any breaches of this rule will be considered seriously by the Committee.

Stop and form a plan. Once you're through the gate, the elevated part of the boat ramp is a good place to stop, observe the surf, and form a plan for launching. Take note of the following:

- Are there any patches of deeper water near the dry sand? These are ideal to launch into.
- Is there a channel of deep water inside the breaking waves where you can sit the boat and wait for a lull in the waves before crossing through the break zone?
- Is there a defined rip which can be used to get through the break zone?
- Where are the surfers and any other people in the water?
- Watch for at least one large set of waves to come through. The reef can be used as a signal and gauge of the waves about to hit the beach. Take note of what a large set looks like on the reef so you can know if a large set is coming during your launch.

Getting off the rocks and onto the sand. Other beach users often use the boat ramp and rocks to walk on and off the beach. Be considerate and courteous, and drive slowly. If any additional speed is required to get through the soft sand immediately at the base of the rocks make sure that all other people are well clear of your intended path before you leave the rocks.

Brief your crew. If your crew members include anyone who doesn't regularly launch at Muriwai with you, give them a good description of what your plan is for launching, what you expect them to do (and not do), and what they should expect to experience on the trip through the surf.

Don't be too proud to go home. If for any reason you are uncertain about launching turn around and go home. Pride is cheap, replacing your boat isn't. And repairing injuries isn't always possible.

Launching and going through the surf.

Getting the boat off the trailer. The most common method for getting the boat off the trailer without getting your car stuck is to eject it off the trailer in the following manner:

- Put your lifejackets on early to avoid forgetting when things get hectic.
- Unhook the safety chain and winch from the boat while still parked on the dry sand. This prevents any unnecessary time undoing shackles while the vehicle is in the surf (and therefore at risk of getting stuck).
- Pick your timing to reverse into the water. Often before a large set of waves hits the beach, the water level sucks back down the beach. This is a good opportunity get the boat into a deeper part of the beach without getting the car too wet (or stuck).
- Reverse into the water and when you think there is enough water to float the boat apply the brakes, let the boat slide off the trailer, and drive the trailer away from the boat. It's tempting to hit the brakes and accelerator hard at this point, but skidding tyres increase the chances of getting stuck in soft wet sand.
- If your rollers are well lubricated and you think your boat may leave the trailer before you're ready, you can use a snap shackle with a long rope attached to the pin so a crew member walking a safe distance from the trailer can release the boat at the right time without being near the trailer.
- Do not let your crew members approach or touch the boat or trailer until the trailer is well clear.
- Once the trailer is clear of the boat, your crew members should turn the bow to face into the surf and hold the boat.

Parking the car. Again, it's tempting to hit the accelerator hard at this point. Do not speed up the beach. Park the car and trailer at the base of the sand dunes at the Southern end of the beach.

In recent years the beach has been so busy during Summer that there have been times where it isn't possible to get through the beach users to a parking spot. If you have to ask someone to move so you can park, please do it politely and with a smile. Your manners will surprise the daylighters out of them, given how tough and scary you look.

Waiting to go. The boat doesn't need to be in particularly deep while you're waiting, just enough to get the leg of the outboard in some water to start it. Get the motor started and confirm that it's running properly.

At this point the adrenaline is usually running and it's tempting just to go. Wait as long as you need and choose your time to go carefully.

When you're happy that everything else is in order and the surf conditions are good (no large sets showing on the reef) then get your crew members to push you out deep enough to lower the motor and get them into the boat. At this point everyone should have lifejackets on. Don't put the motor into gear until everyone is in the boat and clear of the propellor.

Hitting waves. Always keep the bow of the boat facing directly into the waves (unless you're turning around).

Don't rush towards waves unless you are certain that you can get over them (and the one after them) well before they break. Otherwise it's best to sit and let a wave break and its energy dissipate before you cross it.

When approaching an unbroken wave, ease off the throttle and slow down just before crossing the wave to avoid launching the boat into the air.

When you approach a broken wave it is best to have a small amount of forward momentum (e.g. faster than an idle but less than trolling speed) and apply a short small burst of throttle just before you hit the wave. The intention is to stop the boat being pushed backwards by the wave but not cause the boat to launch into the air.

By crossing any wave too fast or with too much power the bow of the boat can be driven upwards and launched into the air. This can result in the boat landing stern first and the risk of swamping the motor and causing it to stall, and water coming into the boat over the transom.

Turning around. Turning around should be a last resort. It risks cavitation, being caught on the bottom, and therefore being caught side-on by the waves and capsize. Only turn around if you are 1) certain that you have enough water underneath and time before the wave arrives to execute the turn, and 2) are very uncertain that you can successfully cross the wave.

Flags and patrolled area. Do not drive the boat through the area patrolled by the Surf Life Saving Club as identified by yellow and red flags.

Returning back through the surf to the beach.

Put your lifejackets back on. If you've taken them off during the day, put them back on before coming through the surf.

Check your fuel. If you use tote tanks, make sure that your current tank isn't about to run empty just as you go through the surf. Swap tanks to a full one in advance.

Stop well behind the breaking surf and watch. As you approach the breaking surf (somewhere between the reef and break zone) you should stop the boat and wait for a few minutes to observe the conditions. Keep a close watch on the waves behind you, as a large set can be a surprise and put you inside the break zone unexpectedly.

Wait and watch at least one large set come through. Key things to watch for are:

- Is there a defined rip which can be used to get through the break zone? This will be identified by where the waves aren't breaking.
- Is there a sand bar or other shallow areas where you may run aground and be caught by the surf?
- Where do you want the boat to be when you retrieve it from the water? Is the water deep enough to get the boat close enough to the shore that you can recover it onto the trailer?
- Where are the surfers and any other people in the water?

Choose a safe path. Use your judgement to choose a safe path which avoids other water users and keeps enough water under the boat that you can avoid being caught-up by the waves behind you. Do not drive the boat through the area patrolled by the Surf Life Saving Club and identified by yellow and red flags.

Follow the last wave of a large set in. This means that you should have as much water under the boat as possible, and there aren't any big waves behind about to catch up with you. On the way in sit the boat on the back of the wave without risking slipping over the front, unless you are unsure about the location of surfers.

Watch for surfers and swimmers. Surfers will want to start their ride where the wave first breaks and ride along towards the deep water (which is probably where you want to bring the boat in through the surf). When the surf is larger it can be difficult to see a surfer on the front of a wave as you follow the wave from behind. Get your crew members to spot for surfers. If you see one take off the wave you are following in, then fall back from the breaking wave until you are certain that they have gotten off the wave and aren't about to pop up in the water immediately in front of you.

Consider carrying a gas-cannister operated air horn as another way to make the surfers aware of your presence and position. Remember that the surfers who see you will (or should) be nervous about having a boat in the water with them, so a wave to acknowledge that you've seen them and are aware of their position is helpful.

You can call the surf tower for help. The Surf Life Saving Club can be contacted in the surf tower on (09) 411 8055 between Labour weekend and Easter weekend. The surf lifesavers may be able to help if you are unable to find a safe passage to the beach through the other water users, or if you are having mechanical trouble and need to take precautions before coming through the surf.

Don't let any waves catch up with the boat from behind. This will either cause the boat to broach and potentially roll, or fill up with water and potentially sink.

Retrieving the boat off the beach

Unless you have a tractor, or a boat which is too large to drag up the beach, the most common approach is to drag the boat on its hull up the beach and sufficiently away from the water before winching it off the dry sand and onto the trailer. This avoids your vehicle being in the water and risking getting stuck. It only takes a small amount of water movement around a vehicle's wheels or loss of traction for the tyres to sink into the sand.

Keep everybody clear. A boat being retrieved from the surf is like a magnet for bystanders on the beach. You should expect a number of people to cluster around as you retrieve the boat. They will want to know what you're doing, where you've been and what you caught. This is possibly the highest risk period for injury to other beach users, from being hit by either a moving vehicle or a strop snapping under pressure.

Before you start dragging the boat up the beach clear everyone from the immediate area, including your crew. The vehicle needs to have a clear path forward up the beach before you start moving, and both the vehicle and boat need a clear area either side which is equal to the length of the strops being used. This is to prevent a breaking strop from hitting anyone.

At this point, the skipper is usually the only person still taking any responsibility for anything (your crew will probably be gas-bagging to their mates, as they don't really care if your vehicle gets stuck). It's a good idea to pass this responsibility to the crew so the skipper can focus on the vehicle and boat without worrying about the crowd.

Auckland is a multi-cultural city with a number of different ethnic groups and languages, and for many people English isn't their first language. This means that communicating your requirements to the crowd can be difficult and frustrating. Please use your patience and manners and at all times remain courteous.

Carry more strops than you think you need. It's not uncommon to need 50m of strop to reach from the trailer to the boat in bad low tide conditions. SuperCheap Auto has 30m long options. Otherwise your only options are to wait for the tide to change, or risk getting your vehicle stuck by driving it into the water.

Only use rated tow strops and shackles. Only drag the boat with a proper 4wd recovery strop, and only attach the strops to secure points on the boat and the trailer with rated shackles. Anchor ropes, other cheap ropes and non-rated shackles risk snapping under pressure and causing an injury. If your strops are worn or frayed then replace them.

Attach the strops to solid points. Looping the strop around the chassis of your trailer is good (it doesn't require a shackle) and the towing eye of your boat is good.

Don't join strops with shackles. If two strops are joined with a shackle and one strop snaps under pressure, then the shackle turns into a missile. Search the internet for "how to join two tow strops together" if you don't know how, or buy a "soft shackle".

Don't jerk the boat harder than you need to. Sometimes getting the boat to move when you first start dragging it (depending on the size of your boat and vehicle) needs a bit of momentum from the vehicle before the strop tightens. Avoid gaining too much speed as the force of the strop coming tight can cause something to break. Having a strop with some stretch in it (a "snatch strap") helps transfer the speed of the vehicle to the boat in a smoother manner.

I acknowledge that I have read and understand these guidelines, and will abide by them as a member of the Muriwai Sports Fishing Club:

Name:

Version date: 21 May 2021

Date:

Signature: