

Bridge collapse forces review

Karla Akuhata
Staff reporter

THE Te Urewera Board has been forced to review its health and safety standards after a bridge on the Lake Waikaremoana Great Walk failed while a group of tourists was crossing it.

Four French tourists were making their way around Lake Waikaremoana on the Great Walk when a cable on the Hopuruahine suspension bridge failed at about 1pm on Thursday.

The group of two women and two men were plunged eight metres into two metres of water.

Apart from shock and a few bruises, the tourists were unharmed and have since continued on their tour of New Zealand.

Board chairman Tamati Kruger has spent much of the past four days working to ensure it never happens again.

Mr Kruger said his first job following the notification of the collapsed bridge was to ensure the French tourists were looked after.

He said he was eventually able to convince the tourists to be checked by a doctor, who gave them the all-clear.

"They were quite upset, shocked and bruised, and we ourselves relayed to them that we were very sorry that this



Tamati Kruger,
Te Urewera
Board chairman

had happened to them. We wanted to make sure that our manuhiri (visitors') welfare and health was the main priority.

"We have talked with them and have got as much as we could to find out the sequence of events from the four tourists. Those four tourists have since gone on with their tour of New Zealand."

Mr Kruger said once he knew the tourists were fine, the next job was to establish the cause of the failure and ensure that other bridges in the area were safe.

"We took the cable from the bridge and that has been taken up to Hamilton for testing.

"We want to find out as best as we can what caused the failure.

"We have just finished checking all of the other bridges on the Great Walk and we have got feedback that there are no worries – so that is really good news for us on that front.

"But we are going to get an independent review of our health and safety standards.

"Te Urewera Board have been talking over the weekend and all of the board think it is a good idea that we have a look at our standards to see if they are still good, or whether they have aged.

"We are about to co-ordinate with the Department of Conservation on finding the best person for that job."

Mr Kruger said the state of the Hopuruahine Bridge was checked in June. He said it had previously been checked by an inspector in September 2014, and before that an engineer in November 2013.

"We are all very fortunate in many ways that it was nothing more serious. Even if nobody was on the bridge it would have been a concern.

"It was one of those accidents that didn't give any clues or indications it was going to happen."

The Te Urewera Board is the primary decision maker for Te Urewera. It was created through the Te Urewera legislation and is made up of Government-appointed representatives and members of Tuhoë.

The Waikaremoana Great Walk remains open from Onepoto road end to Whanganui Hut. Although, the walk is to be walked in one direction, starting only from Onepoto until further notice.

A water-taxi has been arranged to pick up users from Whanganui Hut at 2pm daily.