

Nelson Mail WEEKEND

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Giants' new signing

P24



Who stole our house? **P3**



Boatman wants to live life in peace

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Afloat: A close-up showing the boat that has been lashed underneath the structure.
Photo: BILL MOORE/FAIRFAX NZ

The man who has won a mixture of bouquets and brickbats for building a makeshift houseboat on the Nelson foreshore is a good person who just wants to live quietly, a close friend says.

Paul Jepson built the houseboat out of pallets and corrugated iron while it sat on four piles he'd embedded into the shore of the Boulder Bank which rims Nelson Haven.

Then he lashed drums to its sides, put the hull of an old launch underneath to provide more flotation and cut it free.

This week it has been anchored in about a metre of water at each high tide, well up towards the Glen and far from the few remaining beaches. This morning it was even further north, high and dry close to Boulder Bank Drive, having possibly broken free and been carried there by last night's high tide.

Inside he's got a bed, a portabellied stove with a chimney, a cupboard with kitchen items and a container to hold rainwater that is ingeniously piped in from the guttering. He has a solar panel and a car battery to provide limited power.

Mr Jepson has so far been unwilling to talk directly to the *Nelson Mail* but yesterday he was present in the background while his friend, known around the port as Muzz, answered questions on his behalf.

Muzz - who gave his full name to the *Mail* but asked that it not be used - is the owner of a trimaran that he moors in the Haven, moving it from site to site to comply with the marine regulations.

Speaking from his boat, he said

Mr Jepson was his best friend. "He's a good, honest person. he's the man that I would think would help me if I got into trouble out there."

Mr Jepson, who grew up in sight of the port and formerly worked in one of the engineering businesses on the reclamation, was about 40, had lost his job, wasn't on a benefit and didn't have any money.

He had built the houseboat from what he found washed up on the Boulder Bank, pallets he took apart, drums he got from city businesses and floated down the Maitai River to the sea at night, and other materials he had obtained for little or no cost.

Asked how he hit on the houseboat idea, Muzz said his friend didn't want to sleep rough and decided to make himself somewhere to stay away from town.

"Because he has no income, he goes through the rubbish bins behind the supermarkets and that's where he gets his food from."

"He's just surviving, he gets no help, no support, and he just thought, 'f*** it!'"

"He chose the Boulder Bank

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Essive: A man, believed to be Paul Jepson, photographed from the air in November last year next to the Boulder Bank structure.
Photo: MARTIN DE RUYTER/FAIRFAX NZ

Fun school trip turns nasty as wasps attack

Sasha Borissenko

The excitement of a treasure hunt turned to screams of pain for a group of primary school pupils after a mass wasp attack at Tahunanui Beach.

A grandmother of one of the Victory Primary School pupils, who was helping out on the Pirate Day trip to the beach yesterday, collapsed after suffering a severe allergic reaction to being stung.

She was taken to Nelson Hospital in a serious condition, but was today reported to be stable.

Nine pupils were also taken to hospital suffering from multiple stings. It is understood they were all treated and discharged.

Other pupils received treatment from ambulance staff at the scene or were taken to their own doctors.

The wasps attacked scores of the 90 pupils - who were searching for the last clue in their pirate-themed treasure hunt - after one stood on a nest of wasps in long grass behind the beach just after midday yesterday.

Witnesses described chaos after the attack.

Jovaan Lenoel, 8, said he was enjoying his class pirate adventure when one of his classmates stood "on something and heaps of wasps came flying from the ground".

"There was this girl who was trying to find treasure and then a [wasp] stung her on her neck." Everyone was screaming and running, he said.

Jovaan said he could not really see anything because "too much was going on". He suffered eight stings around his body, arms and legs.

"They managed to get inside my T-shirt. I have no idea how that happened."

He was really scared and had never had anything like that happen to him before.

"I don't want to go to the doctor's. I was told it was going to be a fun day playing pirates and I've been waiting for it all year."

Jovaan's grandfather, George Smith, said the wasps were "everywhere".

"Our first reaction was just grab the kids and run away."

He suffered five stings. "It did not matter, I was just trying to do what I could to get the children safe. It was madness."

Victory Primary School deputy principal and teacher in charge Dave Sullivan said the pupils were searching for the last clue on the



Wounded: Jovaan Lenoel, 8, shows some of the stings he received after wasps attacked his Victory Primary School class at Tahunanui Beach yesterday.
Photos: MARTIN DE RUYTER/FAIRFAX NZ



Casualties: St John paramedics, teachers and Victory Primary School parents treat some of the children stung.

treasure hunt when the wasp nest was disturbed. It was such a shame because everyone had been enjoying the outing.

Acting principal Wendy Taylor said wasps were in the long grass and the pupils "just ran into them".

"They were very brave and the teachers were amazing, and the parents were excellent, too. They did everything right."

"It was a treasure hunt that went wrong." Nelson City Council communications manager Angela Ricker said Nelmac's wasp eradication expert confirmed it was a wasp nest located between the barbecue shelter and beach cafe.

Council contractors cordoned off the area and poisoned the nest.

Contractors kept an eye out for wasp nests in reserves, and removed them.

But the nests could be hard to find because they were often well hidden.

"If anyone spots a wasp nest in a council park or reserve, they should phone the council so our contractors can investigate and hopefully locate and remove the nest," Ms Ricker said.

"Under no circumstances should members of the public touch or attempt to remove a wasp nest themselves."

February and March were the most active time of year for wasps.

Cool heads prevailed in heat of stinging

Nelson city councillor and former *Nelson Leader* journalist **Matt Lawrey** was on his son's school outing when it took a chaotic turn.



It's not every day your son's school trip turns into a disaster movie but that's what happened for about 30 minutes yesterday at Tahunanui Beach.

Victory Primary School's year 3 and 4 kids were having the time of their lives enjoying their much-anticipated Pirate Day. There were children, teachers and

parents dressed as pirates, and pirate games, like cannon tossing and barrel racing.

The kids were looking for the next clue in their treasure hunt when things went pear-shaped. For no apparent reason a

little boy started freaking out. Then the girl next to him started screaming. Then other kids started losing it. Then the grown-ups began wildly swinging their arms and frantically grabbing at the children around them. From a short distance it looked like they had all gone mad.

Those of us who weren't being attacked by wasps rushed forward telling the kids to move and, when they didn't move, to run. Children too traumatised to run were scooped up and together we took off with the wasps in hot pursuit.

After 50 metres the insects beat a retreat, leaving us with about 20 screaming children, many suffering multiple stings. Some still had wasps in their clothes and hair. One boy had a wasp in his ear.

The grown-ups comforted the victims and tried to treat their stings with water, ice and sprays. Then allergies made their presence felt. I was telling a boy to breathe deeply and be brave when his hand swelled up like a boxing glove.

More seriously, someone's grandmother

collapsed. At first she seemed OK but then she appeared to go into anaphylactic shock. She was barely conscious when we carried her to the ambulance.

Throughout it all the teachers and parents remained impressively focused. Everyone jumped in and helped. They all kept it together despite some being stung numerous times.

The best bit, though, was when the decision was made that Pirate Day would go on. No running back to school for the year 3s and 4s of Victory Primary.

Instead it was off to the other end of the beach for lunch, fun in the playground and a swim complete with a handstand competition.

Despite the wasps' best efforts, most of us still had a great day.

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