

River Fun / River Play

Safety Operating Procedure (SOP)



1. Purpose

This SOP outlines the safe planning and delivery of River Fun / River Play activities at the Aongatete River from Aongatete Outdoor Education Centre (AOEC), ensuring risks are effectively managed and all participants are provided with a safe, enjoyable and well-supervised experience.

2. Scope

This SOP applies to all AOEC staff, instructors, group leaders, supervising adults and participants involved in activities at the Aongatete River, including river play, environmental studies, dam building, craft boat activities and river stone construction.

3. Description of Activity

The Aongatete River is accessible from Aongatete Outdoor Education Centre via the Link Track, which starts on the western side of the lodge.

The walk to the river takes approximately 30 minutes one way. A branch of the track provides access to the swimming hole, while another branch leads to a flatter section of the river suitable for groups who wish to spread out and for activities such as environmental studies, supervised dam building, craft boat activities and river stone construction.

The final section of the track to the river may become slippery in damp conditions.

River conditions can change rapidly. Water-based activities must only proceed when river levels, weather conditions and the capabilities of the group are suitable.

The Group Leader and supervising adults must ensure all activities are appropriate for the age, experience, confidence, fitness and additional support requirements of the group.

4. Roles & Responsibilities

The Leader in charge (Group Leader or AOEC Staff) must be familiar with:

- The route to the river and the activity location.
- Outdoor Safety Code principles.
- River and water safety.
- Basic bush navigation.
- Risk Assessment and Management Systems (RAMS).
- Emergency procedures.

The Leader should:

- Visit and assess the activity location before taking a group where practicable.
- Complete a RAMS appropriate for the planned activity and group.

- Assess river conditions before participants enter or begin activities in or around the water.
 - Continuously monitor river levels and changing conditions.
 - Know the water confidence and swimming ability of participants and supervising adults.
 - Ensure at least one trained first aider is present.
 - Be familiar with participants' medical requirements.
 - Ensure participants have appropriate clothing, footwear, food and water.
 - Carry the required emergency equipment.
 - Stop or modify the activity if conditions become unsafe.
- Guiding principle: If in doubt, stay out.
-

5. Ratios

Supervision ratios should reflect:

- Participant age.
- Group size.
- Experience and water confidence.
- Behavioural or medical needs.
- Type of activity.
- River and environmental conditions.

For water-based activities, a recommended minimum ratio is 1 adult to 4 participants.

Additional supervising adults should be provided where necessary to maintain effective supervision and ensure participants remain within effective supervision at all times.

6. Pre-Activity Requirements

6.1 Risk Disclosure & Medical Information

Medical conditions, injuries, behavioural needs, allergies, and mobility considerations must be identified.

A responsible adult must be assigned to participants requiring medication.

6.2 Equipment Checks

Before departure, the responsible leader must check that required equipment is available, suitable and in good condition. Equipment must be checked before departure and carried by the designated responsible adult.

The emergency pack should contain:

- First aid kit.
- Personal Locator Beacon (PLB) and/or suitable communication device.
- Emergency blanket.
- Rainproof layer.
- Warm clothing, including a beanie.
- Torch.
- Drinking water.
- Emergency food.
- Throw rope where appropriate to the planned activity.

6.3 Clothing Requirements & Checks

Participants must wear: Fully enclosed footwear (no bare feet, jandals, or sandals) - Suitable clothing for weather conditions - Rain Jacket - Sun hat during hot weather - Warm clothing and beanie during cold weather - Sunscreen - Insect repellent (recommended) - Water bottle.

Cotton clothing should be avoided for outdoor activities in cool or changing conditions.

Participants should use the bathroom before departure and bring any required personal medication.

7. Environmental & Weather Assessment (Go/No-Go Criteria)

The activity must not proceed if:

- River levels or flow create an unacceptable risk.
- Heavy rain or forecast weather is likely to cause rapidly changing river conditions.
- Flooding or storm damage affects the access track or river.
- The track or river access is unsafe.
- The group does not have the required capability, confidence, supervision or equipment.
- Any other environmental condition creates an unacceptable risk.

The Leader must:

- Assess river conditions before departure.
 - Reassess conditions on arrival at the river.
 - Continue monitoring river levels and weather throughout the activity.
 - Stop, shorten, modify or relocate the activity if conditions become unsafe.
-

8. Safety Briefing (Mandatory for all participants)

Before beginning the activity, the Leader must brief all participants on:

- | | |
|---|---|
| • The planned route. Staying on marked tracks with your group. Stopping at junctions for head counts. | • Environmental care expectations. |
| • Walking safely on uneven and slippery terrain. | • Emergency procedures. |
| • River and stream safety. | • What to do if separated from the group. |
| | • Appropriate behaviour around the water. |

Supervising adults must be present and actively engaged during the briefing.

The importance of the Outdoor Safety Code and river safety should be reinforced with all participants.

9. Activity Management

During the activity:

- Group Leaders maintain regular head counts.
 - Supervising adults monitor assigned participants.
 - Participants must follow instructions from the Leader and supervising adults.
 - River conditions must be monitored throughout the activity. Activities must be stopped immediately if river levels rise or conditions become unsafe.
 - The pace is adjusted to suit the slowest participant.
 - The activity must be stopped, shortened or rerouted if safety is compromised.
-

10. Emergency Response (Summary)

In the event of an incident:

- Group Leader takes control of the situation.
- First aid is administered by trained person
- Emergency services contacted via 111 if required. Personal Locator Beacon (PLB) activated if necessary. Designated person meets emergency services if required.
- AOEC Management is notified.
- Remaining participants are supervised in a safe location.

All incidents must be reported to AOEC management and recorded.

11. Environmental Care (Reinforce this to the students)

- Stay on marked tracks identified by orange DOC markers.
 - Take all rubbish and personal belongings away from the river.
 - Avoid damaging vegetation, seedlings, tree roots and surrounding facilities.
 - Respect wildlife and river ecosystems. Avoid harming or unnecessarily handling creatures found in the river.
-

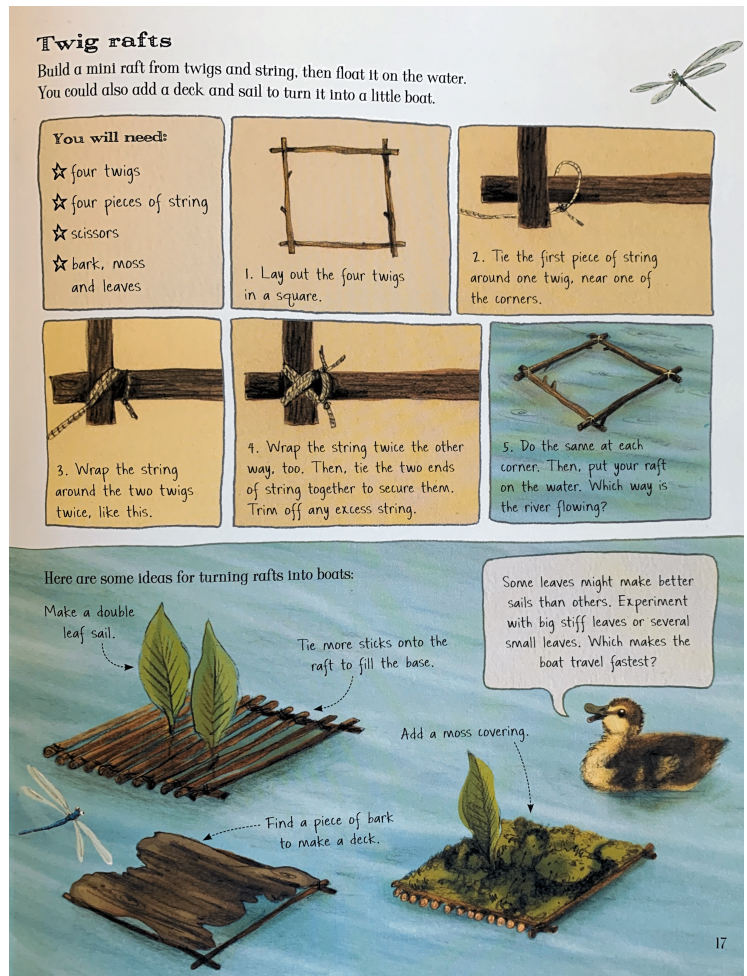
Damming a stream

- Choose a part of the stream that is not wide and easy to walk across.
 - Use rocks and sticks to stop the flow.
 - Dismantle structures before leaving where appropriate.
 - Leave the river environment as close as possible to its original condition.
-

Craft Boats /Twig Rafts

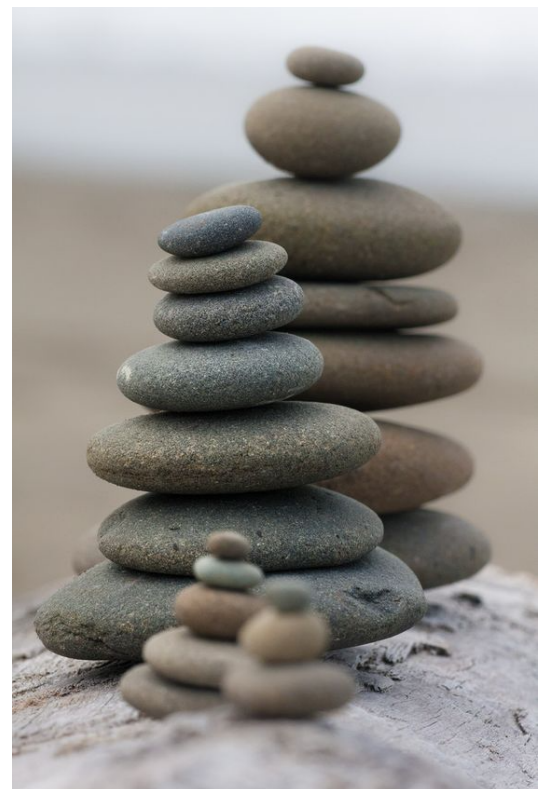
In the event of an incident:

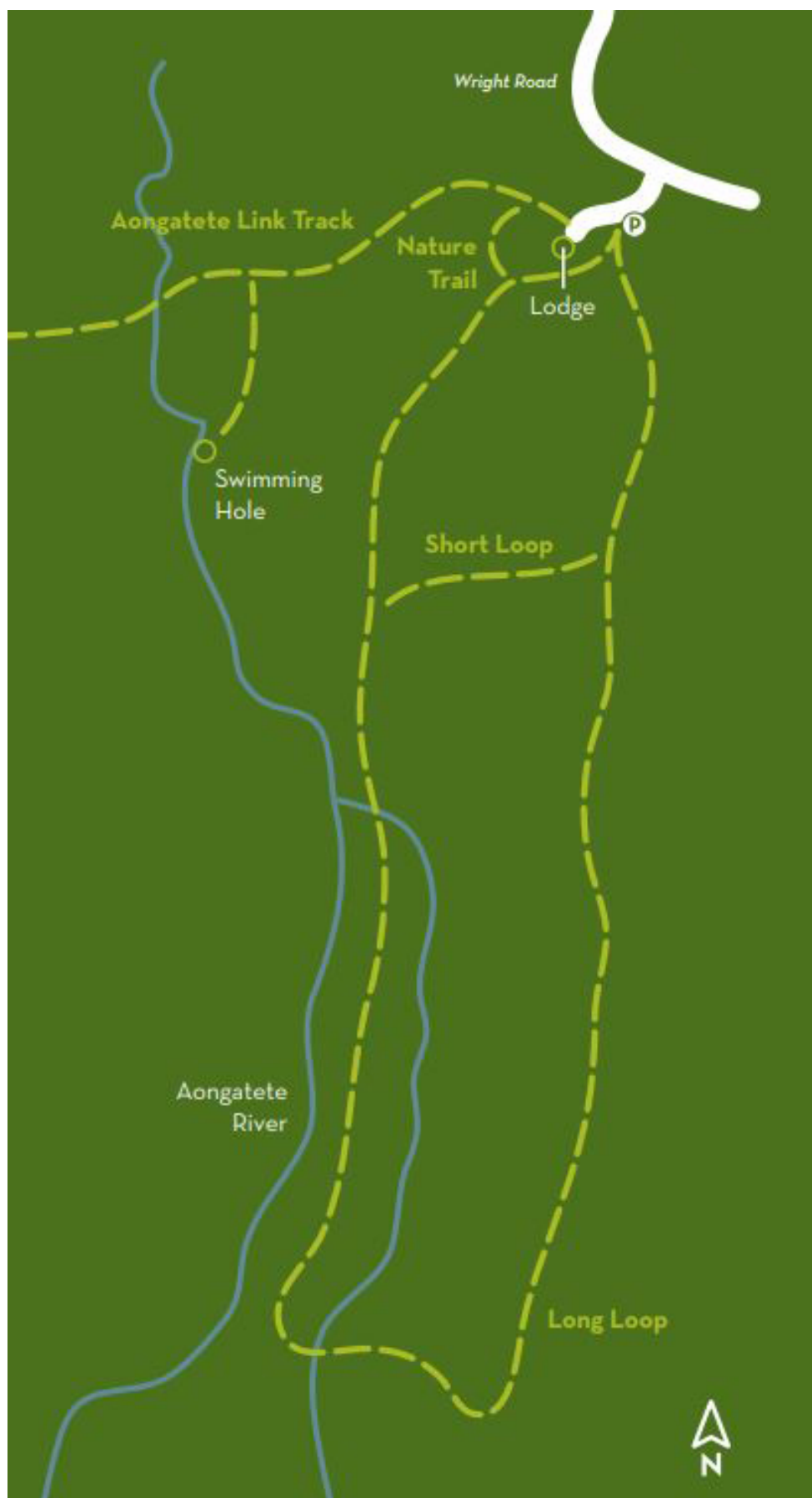
- Use only appropriate natural, biodegradable materials.
- Activities must be supervised.
- Materials must not be taken from living plants or cause unnecessary environmental damage.
- All constructed items must be removed or dismantled before leaving the area.



Stone Towers & Statues

- Use loose stones only where appropriate.
- Dismantle structures before leaving where appropriate.
- Leave the river environment as close as possible to its original condition.





River Fun - Risk Analysis & Management

	Reviewed by: Karen Tobich & Emily Underwood Approved by: Board of Trustee - Nisha Duncan	Date: 12/08/2026	Next Review Date: 12/08/2027		
	Risk Rating System: Likelihood (1–5) x Consequence (1–5): 1–5 Low - 6–10 Moderate - 11–15 High				
	What would cause someone to get hurt?	What could happen?	Risk Rating	Risk Management Control Measures	Risk Rating
	Hazards/Harm	Risk	Initial	What can be prevented? By Whom?	Post Control
People	• Group Leaders/Supervising Adults not familiar with activity instructions, responsibilities & risks	• Death • Major Injury Minor Injury Physical wellbeing (hypothermia/hyperthermia) Damage to the environment	10	• Activity Leaders / Adult Supervisors familiarise themselves with area, Outdoor safety code, environment code, responsibility & RAMS prior to camp/activity commencement.	3
	Bad Planning Outdoor Safety Code not practiced Environment Care Code not practiced	• Death • Major Injury Minor Injury Physical wellbeing (hypothermia/hyperthermia) Damage to the environment	10	• Prepare and follow the outdoor safety code and river safety code.	3
	• Not Sufficient Supervision	• Death • Major injury • Minor Injury • Physical Well-being (hypothermia/hyperthermia)	10	• Allow for a 4:1 Ratio • Identify any non confident swimmers and assign adults to carefully watch/help those individuals • Know the groups numbers and head count before/during/after	3
	• Poor Briefing/instruction	• Death • Major Injury Minor Injury Physical wellbeing (hypothermia/hyperthermia) Damage to the environment	10	• Go with group through instructions, environment care/safety guidelines & hazards • Firmly enforce water safety rules and environment care	3
	• Participants/Supervisors not confident around water or swimming	• Death • Major Injury Minor Injury	9	• Identify non swimmers/not confident swimmers	4
	• Special Needs not identified	• Death • Major injury • Minor Injury Not enough support	6	• Know medical conditions/behaviour issues of students & adults. Who is the nominated knowledgeable person to deal with known medical/behavioural issues. • Adjust activity to fit everyones ability	4
	• Student/Group Leader/Supervising Adult becomes incapacitated (Injury, heart attack, asthma, etc)	• Death • Major injury • Minor Injury	10	• Know medical conditions/behaviour issues of students & adults. Who is the nominated knowledgeable person to deal with known medical/behavioural issues Other Adults in Group must know what to do in an emergency Bring any medication that may be needed. • Pack PLB • Be sure to have a qualified first aider who can preform CPR	8
Equipment	• Poor Clothing & Footwear	• Death • Major injury • Minor Injury • Hypothermia/hyperthermia	9	• Before leaving, check that everyone in group (students and adults) are wearing appropriate clothing and foot ware. Must wear covered shoes, dress for the conditions. • Take extra layers	4
	• No or Insufficient Equipment (emergency food & drink, first aid, extra warm layers, communication device)	• Death Major injury • Minor Injury Hypothermia/hyperthermia	9	• Activity Leaders / Adult Supervisors familiarise themselves with Area, Outdoor Safety Code, Environment Care Code, responsibilities & RAMS prior to camp/activity commencement. Prepare and pack accordingly. • Carry additional warm clothing for emergencies • Carry First Aid Kit • Carry PLB • PLB	3
	• Weather unsuitable for session	• Death • Major injury • Minor Injury • Physical well-being (hypothermia, hyperthermia)	15	• Check weather forecast • Evaluate weather conditions and changes • Be aware of changing river levels/conditions • If in doubt stay out and/or cancel/halt the activity	5

Reviewed by: Karen Tobich & Emily Underwood Approved by: Board of Trustee - Nisha Duncan		Date: 12/08/2026	Next Review Date: 12/08/2027		
Risk Rating System: Likelihood (1–5) x Consequence (1–5): 1–5 Low - 6–10 Moderate - 11–15 High					
What would cause someone to get hurt?		What could happen?	Risk Rating	Risk Management Control Measures	Risk Rating
Hazards/Harm		Risk	Initial	What can be prevented? By Whom?	Post Control
Environment	• Slippery rocks	• Death • Major injury • Minor Injury • Physical well-being (hypothermia, hyperthermia)	6	• Take care • Wear shoes/rock shoes. • Assist each other	4
	• Shallow/deep water	• Death • Major injury • Minor Injury	10	• Warn groups of the dangers of water, drownings can happen in shallow and deep water. • Non confident swimmers to be identified and assisted • Supervisors to watch a selected group of 4	3
	• River to swift, high or cold	• Death • Major injury • Minor Injury • Hypothermia/hyperthermia	15	• Stay out of river, do not attempt to cross if its too high or swift, return the way you came or wait until river is safe to cross.	5
	• Strainer or hidden hazards in the water	• Death • Major injury • Minor Injury	15	• Group Leader/Instructor to check area for hazards before students	3
	• Damage to environment or harm to living creatures	• Damage to environment • Harm to living creatures	4	• Stay on track, follow only orange markers, do not step or pull on plants • Do not harm or touch any living creatures on land or in water	2

Emergency Plan	First Aid	Medical Treatment	Serious Injury
	Who is the trained and nominated First Aider	Follow Emergency Action Plan Discussed at Pre Activity Safety Talk and at Safety Stations	See Emergency Action Plan discussed at Safety Talks and at Safety Stations
	First Aid Kit - Instructors have this	- Katikati Medical Centre 07 549 0411 4 - Clive Road, Katikati	Call 111 or activate PLB
	Know medical conditions/behaviour issues of students & adults and knowledgeable person to deal with it	- Tauranga Hospital, Cameron Road, Tauranga 07 579 8000	Nominate someone to meet Emergency Services at Gate
	Incident & Accident Reporting	- Report to AOEC Management - Incident & Accident Reporting on Safety Log at Kitchen Safety Station	- Report to AOEC Management - Incident & Accident Reporting on Safety Log at Kitchen Safety Station