

# The Southland Times (New Zealand Newspaper)

## 'Truck' wheels found in data

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By SUE FEA

**Scientists analysing sonar search device data collected on Saturday believe they have located the missing army Unimog truck that crashed into the Kawarau River on February 23.**

Sergeant Steve Ereckson, of Cromwell, said yesterday scientists from the Cawthorn Institute, a Nelson-based research centre, had identified the shapes of two wheels, which appeared to be the front and rear wheels of the missing truck, in 8m of water.

Two scientists used a Didson acoustic beam sonar in the river late on Saturday, trying to locate the truck in the hope of finding the third and final soldier missing after the four-wheel drive truck plunged off State Highway 6 into the river.

The body of one soldier was found on the bank after the incident and police were still awaiting dental record identification yesterday of a body found near the Goldfields Mining Centre on Friday.

Mr Ereckson said yesterday the truck appeared to be upside down, about 100m downstream from where the vehicle was believed to have entered the river.

"The stretch of water where this vehicle has been identified is still extremely swift water and decisions will need to be made as to what, if anything, is done in relation to retrieving the vehicle," Mr Ereckson said.

Police would not be putting anyone's life at risk to recover the truck.

Police, search advisers and an army official will meet in Queenstown tomorrow to decide whether it was safe and feasible to salvage the vehicle, he said.

Police had offers from heavy haulage companies in the North Island, regularly used for removing heavy equipment from large ravines, but police had to look seriously at the risks.

"Putting people on top of the water is a different story – once you're going into the water you've got big issues," Mr Ereckson said.

"The families have (also) said they don't want anyone else put at risk."

Police had been searching for the truck in the hope the third crash victim could be recovered, but there was no guarantee the body was still with the truck or that both could be salvaged safely, Mr Ereckson said.

Army public relations officer Major Denise Mackay said yesterday recovery of the missing soldier's body was the most important focus so it could be returned to his family but, if there was a possibility the vehicle could be recovered, it would be good to get it out of the river as it may be an environmental hazard, she said.

Recovery of the vehicle was not necessary for the army Court of Inquiry already under way, she said.