

where I grew up. They use the ropes for tying marker buoys to long lines.'

Wallace thought there might have been a dinghy at the back of the ketch. This would explain why he let the three off at the port side of the ketch, rather than the stern where he normally would. 'Once they were on the ketch I said, "Are you guys all right with this?" I just had a feeling it wasn't right. They were both facing me and said, "Yes." I backed away from the ketch, went to the bow and carried on to Solitude Jetty to drop off the other young female and male on the boat. I didn't see whether Ben and Olivia went into the cabin or not. That was the last I saw of them.'

Wallace then recounted his next rides, ferrying people out to their boats. His last trip was to a fishing boat. After he had dropped the fishermen off, at about 5 a.m., he noticed that the ketch was still in the inlet. 'There was no life on it, no lights on or anyone on deck.'

That evening Tom Fitzgerald reported to the daily briefing that Wallace was making his own inquiries with Furneaux staff and others to try to pin down timings and other factors. Wallace believed the original timings he had given police were about an hour out, and he was now trying to sort them out. He was presumably trying to be helpful, but police hackles are always raised by a witness who tries to gather evidence rather than merely give it.

Detective Constable Sanders reported on his interview with Watson. He said he was making more inquiries with Sandy Watson, but she was unable to help much. She hadn't been at Furneaux on the night and did not think her brother was involved.

The rest of the briefing reflected the routine into which Operation Tam was settling a week after Ben and Olivia had been reported missing.

The ground search had focused on Endeavour Inlet that day. Progress was very slow and nothing of value as evidence

had been found. The smell of something dead in a stream appeared to be nothing. A sleeping bag cover had been handed in to the inquiry, and would be shown to the families the next day. There were reports of an unknown, very drunk young blonde woman at Furneaux on the night but it was proving hard to identify her – there were no bookings for the tent that security guards had taken her to – and there was certainly nothing to suggest she was Olivia. In fact, Ben's father, John, appeared to have heard the same stories of a drunk blonde, and had talked to her on his first visit to Furneaux to rule out these descriptions as Olivia.

Wayne Stringer reported that 75 of the 82 boats seen in photos and videos had now been identified. He was most interested in a boat called something like *Mea New Zealand*, he said. 'This looks like our vessel. It was described by the water taxi people as being in about the same position as Wallace describes, so it all seems to tie in.' Stringer told the briefing his team was alerting Maritime Safety, Customs and Interpol about the boat to try to pin it down.

Simon Moore reported another suspect on the basis of information from Whangarei police. The man was facing several arrest warrants and had been involved in rip-offs in Ashburton and Wanganui in 1997. His name had come forward because he was missing and he seemed to have a habit of targeting overseas tourists, particularly women.

Dick Rolton had picked up some exhibits from Ben Smart's house and was planning to take a full statement from Ben's sister Rebecca.

There were still no sightings nor any information about what might have happened to Ben and Olivia after they boarded the boat.

Over the next few days, 15 more staff would be joining the inquiry, drawn from all over the South Island. They would take numbers to 44, and make Tam the biggest investigation in the