

from all around the country. One in particular, from Gisborne, attracted serious interest from police. A local woman was adamant she saw a boat exactly like the mystery ketch sailing out of Gisborne Harbour. Independently, another local who was unaware of the first woman's sighting reported to Gisborne police that he had seen a man who matched the compusketch. Like many other such sightings, it eventually drew a blank.

By the end of the weekend the Operation Tam team had approached the owners of at least 50 ketches that supposedly matched the description given by Guy Wallace. But they either didn't fit the bill or had clearly not been at Furneaux on the night. Some were not remotely similar to the mystery ketch. Another boat discounted was the *Mea New Zealand*, which was found to have been booked in at the Picton ferry terminal until 1 January.

The lack of any sighting of a ketch like the one described by Wallace was leading police to a difficult conclusion: that Wallace, their star witness, may have been mistaken. 'We can be fairly certain that this ketch does not exist but still cannot discount it completely,' Rob Pope told the daily briefing on Sunday.

Further, by that day, police had established that Watson's *Blade* had been moored very near the location Wallace said he had delivered the couple and the mystery man to on his last trip.

Still, the Operation Tam team was a way off going public with that change of stance. In the meantime it was working on plans to enhance one of the panoramic views of the inlet on New Year's Eve and have it published in newspapers in the hope that the handful of boats that had possibly escaped their inquiries might be recognised by someone in the public.

Over the weekend, police intensified their efforts to sort out Guy Wallace's evidence. Apart from his insistence on the ketch which they were beginning to doubt even existed, police were

privately becoming concerned about a possible link between Wallace and Watson. As two young men in Picton, both interested in boats, it seemed hard to believe they didn't know each other. Wallace was talked to again but added nothing significant. He said he did know Scott Watson's mother, Beverley. About four years previously he had worked as a barman at the Beachcomber Motor Inn, in Picton, where Beverley worked in the kitchen. But he said he didn't know Scott Watson, and when shown a photo montage he did not pick him out. But police were not totally satisfied. They decided that Detective Tom Fitzgerald would put more work into establishing if there really was any local link between the water taxi driver and his passenger.

The doubts about Wallace's ketch put more focus back on Scott Watson and his yacht, the *Blade*. So did another troubling report received by police. A couple of kids had been playing with their toy walkie-talkies – no doubt Christmas presents – at Titirangi Bay in the northern the Marlborough Sounds on 2 January when they said they picked up a woman's voice putting out a may-day call. She said she was on a boat called the *Mad Dog*. At first police received only a second-hand report, but at the Operation Tam HQ they were particularly keen to check it out. Watson's *Blade* had previously been known by different names, including *Cascade*, *Caligula*, *Terror* and *Mad Dog*.

But at that point only a handful of people – mainly Watson's immediate family – could have known about the earlier name for the boat. There was no way the children with their walkie-talkies could have known they had stumbled into a major story with their talk of *Mad Dog*. And the source of their call remains unexplained.

'We've gone back to the manufacturers,' Rob Pope says. 'It was not possible under any atmospheric conditions for those radios to pick up marine radio. The other thing, the location of