

Dining with a diva: Kevin Tromp, Marc Perkins and Charles Williams of Wilderness Search and Rescue had lunch with Diana Ross at the Cape Sun Hotel yesterday.

Singing legend's charm blows rescue team away

HELEN BAMFORD

IT'S NOT every day you get a lunch invitation from a world-renowned diva.

So a group of guys from Wilderness Search and Rescue were gobsmacked to say the least when they received a call from Diana Ross's agent saying she would like to meet them in her suite at the Cape Sun Hotel, where she and children are staying in Cape Town where she sang at a concert last night.

Ross wanted to meet the team who responded when her former husband, Norwegian shipping magnate Arne Naess, plunged to his death while scaling a rockface in the Franschhoek Mountains last year.

She also gave them all tickets to her show at the Bellville Velodrome.

Naess, who was 66 and had successfully climbed Mount Everest, fell while being watched through binoculars by his hosts, South African business tycoon Anton Rupert and his son Johann. The team, comprising brothers Dion and Kevin Tromp from Metro High Angle Rescue, Marc Perkins and Miguel Albequeque from the SA Red Cross Air Mercy Service and Charles Williams from Metro Rescue, flew to the farm and found

Naess lying dead under his ropes at the foot of a high cliff.

Yesterday Ross met three of the team and blew them away with her charm. Williams said it had been just the four of them – him, Kevin Tromp, Perkins and Ross – and they had all sat around a table in her suite enjoying wine, sandwiches and fruit.

"She was so down to earth I didn't feel intimidated at all," he said.

Tromp said Ross, who had been wearing a stylish black suit, had been very interested in Wilderness Search and Rescue and how it operated.

He said the singing legend would be going to Franschhoek today to walk in the mountains where the tragedy took place. "I think the family hope to find closure," he said.

Tromp added that Ross put on no airs at all. "She's a wonderful woman and it was a very unexpected but lovely gesture."

Perkins said he was amazed at how much younger Ross looked than her 61 years. "Her face is gorgeous."

And it was just as well the men were as fit as they are. Just before the lunch ended, Cape Town's power failed and the three of them had to climb down 64 flights of stairs to get from the 32nd floor of the hotel.



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Sentimental journey: Diana Ross arrives at Cape Town airport.