

## **Paddle Around the Coromandel**

- Evan - 2/8/10

Lucky as I am to have a wife (Linda) who is glad to drop me off (get me out of the house) at short notice and Thursday April the 29th was to be that day. Opal Hot Springs just past Matamata on the edge of the Waihou River was the start point for a trip that would finish only 20 kilometres away in a straight line but taking 10 days and 420 kilometres to complete.

I arose to the alarm going off and got sorted making sure nothing was left in the cabin and wheeled my kayak across the road and through/under the gate and roughly erected fence to get in beside a bank. I had a rope for this purpose as the need to slide the kayak into the current from the metre high edge could easily steal the kayak from your grip, hence making for a very bad start to the day.

No problem and the water was low as no rain has fallen for some time. Getting in was fairly easy. I departed as daylight got going to allow me to see my way along this very windy river, sometimes heading north sometimes heading south, corner after corner. The couple of trees which were across the river from our last group trip down here were gone but unfortunately replaced by about 8 others, some leaving only a small gap to get around on one side before having to scarp like mad across to the other bank to get around the next one which had fallen the opposite way before you are swept into the branches by the current. A bit nerve racking for a while but all fine and no real issues.

Even came across a small rapid near where a side stream joins in, not usually there but due to the lowness of the water level I shot through at 24 kilometres per hour on the GPS, very shallow though. There were heaps of ducks due to duck shooting season starting in a couple of days and a lot of kingfishers darting from log to log along the river. I camped on the left bank about one and a half kilometres before the Paeroa road bridge, dragging the kayak up the grassy bank before erecting my tent for the night and having my well deserved dinner. Covered 88 kilometres starting at 6.40 a.m. finishing 5.10 p.m. Calm weather all day.

Friday up and away in the dark I knew the incoming current would be against me soon. But it was calm and pleasant as it gradually became light as I paddled on down the river. The wind slowly came up and the current finally started coming in, so was against me as I slogged on, and on at about 4 kph for about 4 hours until the current started heading out and assisted me on my way again but still into the headwind before exiting the river into the Firth of Thames. Then, since the tide level was low, I needed to keep heading out and not follow the shore as I would have ended up walking for a long, long way. It can be shallow for several kilometers off shore until you get further north.

I headed off to near Tararu and followed the coast to Tapu, stopping on the beach and wheeling the kayak the couple of hundred metres to the camp and booked a caravan for the night. There is a pub across the road so I got a steak meal which went down very well. The waitress was new and I was her first customer so a bit of fun was had. Covered 59 kilometres starting at 6.05 a.m. finishing at 5.05 p.m. On water time just under 10 hours, headwinds nearly all day.

The forecast for Saturday was 30 knot SW winds and so it was. I booked another night and stayed put as I was knackered after the long hard day the day before. When

I approached a group of fishermen in camp and commented that they had a great catch of snapper they went deathly silent and gawked at me, I sauntered off thinking they must have thought I was a fisheries officer perhaps. Got a steak burger this time for tea and a fresh loaf of bread from the local shop to take with me.

Sunday, southerly winds and I was off heading north and once up to Dead Mans Point and across Te Koumu harbour, I island hopped (there are many camping spots around here) past the western end of Whanganui Island. Then directly north till off Papaaroha where I ducked in behind an island for a rest and a bit of shelter before continuing on to just north of Colville Bay where I intended to camp. Once there I decided to carry on to Fantail Bay with the following waves and wind. A lot of the waves earlier had me scooting along at 14 and 15 kph for a time which was thoroughly enjoyable. The road follows the coast nearly all the way up here but is still reasonable paddling with rocky outcrops and bouldery beaches.

You can easily find Fantail Bay as there is a rocky piece of land sticking out with a rough stony boat ramp facing south which I pulled up at and after fitting the wheels it is a hard drag for 20 metres up a loose stone beach before crossing the road to set up camp away from the numerous campervan, house buses that are always there. A nice quiet bunch though. One chap asked if I fished (as everyone does) and I explained my plans. He was amazed and said "We all do different things on the water don't we!", which is correct. Today covered, again 59 kilometres starting at 6.20 a.m. finishing 3.15 p.m. Good tailwind all day, six hours at one stage without a stop today.

Monday Forecast was 2 meter SE swells on the east coast so wasn't looking forward to that as I sauntered on leaving late as I needed to get the tides at Cape Colville. Nice up this part as the road goes inland away from the coast leaving only the rugged shore with wild goats here and there scattered about the hillside. It doesn't take long to get to Port Jackson before carrying on to Cape Colville where the tide would be turning and heading out and eastwards from here. There are reefs at Cape Colville and to the east of Fletchers Bay but since it was nearly high tide they caused no concern. The tides when big can cause a fair bit of a tidal stream across these two reefs but not today. In fact after a quick stop at Fletchers Bay I had a back eddy with me as I went through the nearby reef and past Square Top Island and to the Pinnacles where once around the corner I was anticipating some hard paddling but was glad to have only perhaps one meter swells and a little clapotis off the cliffs.

All this top part is lovely with steep cliffs and not many landing spots as I carried on and paddled past Stony Bay before heading across Port Charles, past more cliffs with a few landing spots on a calm day and down to the DoC campsite in the southern corner of Waikawau Bay. Landing right in the corner allows you to wheel the kayak up the boat ramp through the gate and into the campsite. Memories flooded back from a group trip where we became stranded here for three days. The group choose two different areas to camp and became known as the Coasters and Swampys.

I stayed strong and camped as last time in the swampy area which I had to myself. By laying the solar shower out in the sun, I found this was the best way to make the sun go away and it worked within about five minutes and it had gone for the day. I found a great spot to camp with no sheep poo within about a foot of the tent so quite lucky really. I then boiled some water later for a shower which I had after dinner. Today was 35 kilometres in fine weather. Started at 7.40 a.m. off water at 1.30 p.m.

Tuesday, packed up and standing at the beach awaiting daylight then out on to flat calm water and past the rich peoples houses at Little Bay (helicopters and all), heading south past more great coastline and once to Kennedy Bay I actually angled (ferry glided) into the bay as there was quite a westerly blowing out and I felt a tad uncomfortable with it full side on. Once I turned back out I was away and surfed back out then a quick stop at the lovely New Chums Beach then down past Whangapoua and had the tail wind start kicking in allowing me to surf the next 20 kilometres. The few kilometres before Otama were a hand full as with our last trip with lots of clapotis and mixed up waves going in all directions. I was glad to have a stop at Otama in the sheltered corner before the trip around the end past Opito Bay. After Opito there are some great caves off the southern point but not for exploring today, since of course I now had a major struggle the last few kilometres into a westerly to the camp site on the southern side of the Peninsular at Waitaia Recreation reserve. I landed, fitted the wheels then thought bugger (or something like that), I'm at the wrong spot.

I later worked out I was at the correct spot but wasn't leaving anyway and pitched the tent on the sand at the back of the beach. I knew it wasn't a big tide so felt pretty safe there. I couldn't find my bread but discovered that I had pushed it right up the back with my bed roll when packing that morning. The good news it wasn't as squashed as I thought it would be. I enjoy my sandwiches for lunch and found a complete lettuce lasts very well wrapped in a T towel. I finished one on this trip after eight days and it was as good as a fresh one. Along this coast you get some ripper sunrises. That's another real good reason to be on the water early. Distance 45 kilometres fairly windy, had started at 6.20 a.m. finished 2.10 p.m.

Wednesday - I left the beach again just as the visibility was enough to see, and the third metre high wave got me full on, broke just in the wrong place and whacked me pretty good to get my full attention for the day ahead. Out past the reef protecting the bay and into 2 metre waves coming from the SE again as the wind had turned around a lot during the night. I had to get a couple of kilometres off shore before the washing machine effect settled and the rest of the short day consisted of 3 out of 10 waves being around two metres and some breaking so on I plodded aiming directly for Hahei. I was far from shore and aware of my position being all alone etc.

I finally got to Hahei and had thoughts going through my mind of camping ground (cabin) cafe (food) and showers (cleanliness) but I was stronger than that and paddled on to the end of the beach to have a break and a feed. I then proceeded out to the point and around it before seeing it was pretty rough then turning around and going back to the camp ground for a shower, cabin and a feed. Safety first even though I felt good.

I give the camp ground lady credit for her help and offer of two duvets and not laughing or the likes since when I had a look in the mirror later I had salt caked all over my face from the morning paddle. I had washed my hands and feet well before I went to the office but should have done more. I walked up to the store for fresh supplies and to the cafe for lunch. The store has plenty of goodies but of course the cafe wasn't open on a Wednesday so off I sauntered like a kid that had lost his candyfloss. Only 13 kilometres, starting at 6.30 a.m. finishing at 9.20 a.m.

Thursday - I found the best place to get a kayak up on wheels to be at the far southern end of the camp ground where there is a hard walkway rather than the soft sand along further so used this in the morning to re-launch and off around the corner to find it

had settled a lot and was calm for the first hour before a light head wind came in. Again left over swells bounced around near the rocky shoreline as I ventured on past Pauanui. There are a few options for camping along here but I carried on to Onemana Scenic Reserve for my intended stop before deciding to push on to set up for the next day's tides and harbour trip. Waimama Reserve just North of Whiritoa was a fine spot to camp on a bit of grass up the back. Covered 52 kilometres, starting at 6.30 a.m. off water by 3.40 p.m.

Friday - In the kayak and heading south on flat calm water with the hint of a swell on the beaches, caves and arches along here but not for me today as I carried on the 24 kilometres to the Bowentown entrance to the Tauranga Harbour. I always get anxious entering through here and this was the first time from the north as the other ten times or so have been from the south side. New territory but not a problem as only small waves were rolling in and none breaking so in I went and stopped just around the point for a well earned rest. High tide at Tauranga was at 1.45 p.m. so that made the centre of the harbour an hour later as I slowly make my way with current helping. I knew I would be quite early so had another stop along the way. I tried to follow the channel as much as possible as this definitely helps with your speed getting the added extra current.

I get to the middle early and have to get out and walk in the few inches of water for a couple of hundred meters but don't mind too much, its fascinating as you drift in the shallows you can see the water heading the same way as you then suddenly your past that invisible line and its going the opposite way. Decisions, shall I carry on to the mount, camp at the camp ground there, its Friday night in town and noisy, good things would be a hamburger, and pub to watch the league test. I would catch the incoming tide then to bring me back up the harbour a wee bit and onto my finishing point. Never camp on the 24 kilometre long Matakana Island the owners, locals will not allow it and we have been abused big time on a day trip so that was out of the question, but across the harbour I see a spot perhaps so I paddle the three kilometres across to it and find not a bad spot to base from on the northern corner heading up the Wairoa river. Covered 51 kilometres started at 6.30 a.m. finishing at 3.50 p.m.

Saturday - I knew in the morning it would be shallow and I was correct as I had to paddle no less than 3 kilometres around a sand bank before heading up the Wairoa River. Again following the channel I ended up walking a hundred meters but after that I was off. The tide was going out too which didn't help but I had all day and Linda wasn't picking me up till 4.00 p.m. and I was going to stop at the coffee cart near the main road bridge for a steak sandwich, (of course, why would they be there today), then I stopped at Waimarinos kayak shop to see Blair, but he wasn't there either. It seems like no one cared anymore. Between the rail bridge and main road bridge I had seen a bittern, fairly rare and I have only seen two before. Quite a neat heron type of bird you will normally find in or near reeds. On I paddled till I got to the pick up spot about one kilometre from the dam. I dragged the kayak up the bank and found a tree to shelter under, my book to read and some food to eat. Linda was very early to collect me and off home for a real dinner. Covered 18 kilometres from 8.00 a.m. till 12.05 p.m.

The trip completed I'd covered 420 kilometres over 10 days, 9 paddling days, no rain, 2 windy days 63 hours and 20 minutes on the water, averaging 6.6 kph. On those 9 paddling days I had stops totalling 6 hours and 10 minutes, with others you usually stop for longer but on my own a quick stop if I can get one is fine