

A Beginner's Trip to D'Urville Island

I didn't know much about the sea before this trip, this is an un-cool account of my August eight day encounter with this fickle creature. The craft was a Folboat, a double folding kayak made in South Carolina, about twenty years ago, bright red with a blue hull, nicknamed Big-bird. The crew, me, and my buddy Bevan who is a bit of a sea dog. – Nora Flight

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We depart Tuna Bay, Tennyson Inlet at 11.00 a.m. on Sunday and have conditions mostly with us to a beach by Harding Point. The tide is with us as we cruise on past the Chetwode Islands the next morning, aiming for the Jag Rocks sitting on the calm sea. Two hours to these wonderful hunks of rock in the middle of no-where, then onto Billhook Bay with alternating head winds and oily-calmness. A quick snack there, then around the notorious Cape Stevens with its ominous square holed rock and the Sisters. An out-going tide slows our approach to Port Hardy, but we reach the charming May Island beach with its lush native bush and wekas in time to pitch camp before dark.

Tuesday brings rain but good conditions for paddling out of Port Hardy. We paddle up the South Arm, admiring the bush, collect water, then head out around Nile Head to Otu Bay. We could do many miles today with the tide and swell behind us, but decide to camp in Otu Bay instead. We land in rain on a little ripple of a wave, pitch the tent and listen to the rain. In two hours all we can hear is the continuous roar of the three-four foot surf on the beach that we had landed on. Surprising the speed of change. Wednesday is a tent day due to the rough conditions on both sea and land. Thursday looks much improved so we charge through a bit of surf with the odd curler. Bevan got an eye whacked with a paddle in the excitement. The joys of double kayaking.

Out around Bottle Point the water is seething and angry, definitely not the place for our chunky kayak. It is no place for a land-lubber like me either- those three metre breakers are monstrous. So it is a compulsory bread-making and report writing afternoon on a smooth stony beach with heaps of firewood. The stones glowed red-hot under our camp-fire that night.

We saw a ship going past early this morning, Friday. Were getting to the stage of dreaming up schemes to hitch a ride by all manner of ingenious means. Will we ever get around Bottle Point? It seems that the best advice when travelling along exposed coastlines is to make the most of good conditions while you have got them. At mid-day the wind seemed to have died down, plus the tide had turned so that the waves should be less steep at the point. Out we go. Through the neck of the Bottle aided by a bit of tap-dancing on the rudder foot controls by the grim sailor in the stern. We wouldn't have wanted the surge to push us onto the rocks in the neck.

We spend the next three hours being pushed by the swell, current and wind to arrive at Te Puna Bay by the southern tip of D'Urville – 22 km, not bad. Since it is still raining Bevan decides to experiment with pitching his tent by putting the fly up first.

Saturday we do the usual beach scavenge then head over to Croisilles Harbour. A nice little head wind makes me start to think seriously of beech forests and tussock slopes. At least with tramping you don't get blown backwards. Anyway, this wasn't that bad, but we land on Goat Island in the entrance of the harbour - a glorious wee island covered with bush and surrounded by a rocky reef. We collected paua and mussels, these latter being the fattest and most plentiful I have seen outside a mussel farm. With a dying wind and incoming tide we head around Cape Soucis, and since the whim takes us, land at Oananga Bay. It saw the biggest bonfire ever on its beach that night.

Powered by the last of our Tararua biscuits we charge out onto a calm sea on this last morning, around Whangamoa Head to Pepin Island. There are mutterings from the stern about sunbathing on deck, but luckily it is still goose-pimplly warm. We land at Nelson Harbour at 5.30 p.m.