

The Voyage of the *Blue Fox*

by Conrad Edwards

This story tells of an intrepid expedition by an English man, a Kiwi woman and a German kayak, from farewell Spit to Picton along the rugged coast of New Zealand's mainland. They met with many adventures, mostly of the wet and windy variety, and only ran out of oat bars once.

Christmas Eve 1994 saw Maria Bogers and I at the base of Farewell Spit, assembling the boat and dry loading it for the first time. For want of room we left with Maria's father the Thermette, my raincoat and her sleeping mat. Maria abandoned also her party dress and shoes, evidence that her ideas on sea kayak trips were evolving rapidly. We had more or less adequate clothing remaining, although Maria stole my rafting sandals whenever she could, and I her fleece top.

We moved quickly and I was soon standing in the shallows, watching the water under the boat ebb while Maria said her fond farewells. We got away just in time to avoid embarrassment and followed the channel markers out. There was a gentle drizzle and little wind - perfect paddling. Looking back, we saw our lift driving home and we were on our own, miles from the nearest tavern.

The third member of our party was the *Blue Fox*, a Klepper Aeriis II double sea kayak, of the same variety and vintage that Hans Lindemann crossed the Atlantic in. Despite the invention of fibreglass, Kleppers remain the choice of many military forces and scientific expeditions, as well of course as of the odd eccentric.

Like me, the *Blue Fox* was in her thirties, although she looked as new: varnished ash and blue canvas, classically beautiful and demonstrably seaworthy. Like her owner again, she creaks and groans reassuringly in the waves.

Our plan was to paddle the South Island's north coast, from Farewell Spit to Picton. The only other element of our plan was to take about two weeks doing it and we carried sufficient supplies for that.

GOLDEN BAY

Our hope was to paddle first to the end of Farewell Spit itself, either crossing the mouth of Golden Bay, or doubling back to the coast, but the gale and heavy rain warnings suggested that we stay inshore.

The western coasts of Golden and Tasman Bays are generally low lying and unchanging and so shallowly shelving that, from water deep enough for easy paddling, shore features became confused. For identifying landing places and camp sites, and locating the shallows, we used Aerial Surveys Limited's *Coastal Photomaps*. Their excellent black and white aerial photographs gradually turned to pulp in my imperfect map case. They would have been our main navigation aid even if I'd remembered the maps.

The first camp site that we reconnoitred was rejected on local aesthetics. By the time we had made this weighty decision, the boat had been stranded by the continuing ebb and had to be juggled and then towed free. Luckily, I towed Maria fast enough to prevent a rotten shark's head being hauled aboard as bait. Our second attempt was more and most successful, an uninhabited and steeply shelving beach, with flat sand up against the sea grass. We hoped that six inches above the high tide mark would be good enough, and it was. Both exhausted from the long hours of work pre-trip, rather

than from the two hour paddle, we slept for fourteen hours, waking to a beach scattered with people, walking, collecting tuatuas and pulling in crab nets.

The weather people, full of Christmas cheer, had changed their mind on the northwesterly gale and opted instead for sou'westerlies of forty knots gusting fifty. As there was only twenty knots or so when we arose, and our course lay close to a soft shore, we headed off. Approaching Collingwood, we veered offshore to clear an uncovered sand bar, which moment the malevolent southerlies chose to hit with full force. The sea foamed, all the worse for its shallowness and we pointed the bow through the short sharp chop to shore. As some particularly ominous waves approached, Maria stopped to inquire which way to lean, but must have just heard my pleas of, "Keep paddling!"

We barely made headway into the wind and spray, finally hauling ourselves ashore to collapse under a giant *Macrocarpa* tree. Too windy for a fire, we erected the tent to thaw out in. Months later, Maria confessed to a friend that she was thinking that I must normally paddle in conditions like that and was mighty relieved when the tent went up and the boat stayed tied down.

Maria shocked me by suggesting that she walk into Collingwood for some cigarettes, so I gave her, her Christmas present - a pipe. And so went Christmas day, with fresh tuatuas for dinner, followed by a powwow.

We carried a collapsible trolley, vintage Klepper courtesy of David Banks. We tested it on Boxing Day morning, on a portage across the half mile of beach that low tide had revealed. The wheels, designed for concrete-clad Europe, sank into the soft sand, but it sure beat carrying.

We paddled off on a flat sea, staying close to the shore and the land slipped gracefully past, a pleasantly varied wooded coastline, dotted with luxurious looking beaches. We passed the remains of an old jetty, standing detached in the water, adorned with shags.

With light winds and a glassy sea, we crossed directly from Patons Rock to Abel Tasman Point, rather than follow the coast past the mouth of the Takaka River and Pohara. Australian Gannets and swarms of shags accompanied us. The wind swung around to the north, a sea breeze, broadside on but not unpleasant Maria's arms got more tired, the pauses more frequent and longer. Eventually we arrived at the far shore, where lay a glorious cove of coarse golden sand. The place was deserted, although Tarakohe resort was just around the coast: tourists are delightfully gregarious and so easily avoided. We collapsed there, the *Blue Fox* swaying on rock moorings. Maria the hunter-gatherer supplemented dinner with oysters, mussels and banana passion fruit. We discovered that Voltarin makes a passable massage oil.

THE PADDLING DAY

Thus we entered into some sort of a daily routine. At 5.03 a.m. the alarm sounds for the marine forecast, which I soon learned to write down, as snoozing dulls the memory. At 6:30am the watch bleeps again, for the general forecast. I get up, fossick around, take photos, brew coffee and update the memoirs. Sometime later, Maria emerges, lights a cigarette and gradually transforms herself into a human being. Breakfast follows, usually something with bacon in it

We strike camp and squeeze it into a dozen dry bags of all sizes and colours. We carry the boat to the water line and, load by load, the bits and bags that travel in her. We

load the boat in the water - everything in its place - fit the spraydecks, try to remember to lower the rudder and off.

Paddling was the essence of the trip: the ever changing nuances of wind and sea; the breeze and spray on the face; the delightful rhythm of two paddles in unison; the vistas ever opening and changing around one; and the growing satisfaction of aching muscles and distance covered.

At 12.30 p.m. the watch would bleep a third time, for the long range weather forecast and our pre-arranged cell phone listening schedule. An enforced fifteen minute rest, usually on the water and a chance to delve again into our dwindling supply of oat bars.

After some hours of paddling, we would land for lunch and rest, perhaps leaving the boat afloat, moored to rocks, or pulling her ashore. I would put on light clothes to protect myself from the midday sun and Maria would take off hers. Sometimes a short stop, sometimes a long one, dependent on the venue, our tiredness and Maria's sunbathing schedule.

On again for the pre-prandial paddle, often in the afternoon's sea breeze. Choosing a camp site, we would beach, unload the boat and carry everything ashore, the process accelerated by the prize of dry clothes. Then we could relax, tie down the boat, set up camp, start a fire, beachcomb and plan in our ad hoc fashion the evening meal and tomorrow's paddle. Dinner was typically pasta with those staples of life: oil, garlic, cheese, tomato and pepper in varying combinations. After dinner, Maria started working on reasons why she should have my mattress that night

There is something magical about ending the day tucked into an unknown and deserted beach, self-contained, travellers rather than mere tourists. The sea breeze would usually die at dusk and we would sit around a drift wood fire, digesting dinner, relaxing the paddling muscles and talking with the confidence of those who have achieved something together.

To describe the trip requires some form of chronology. But an itinerary of landings and launchings, seas and beaches, risks missing the real attraction of kayaking. That lies in the intangibles, ultimately the freedom to come and go as one pleases, at home and alone with the ever changing elements. They are the essence and magic of sea kayaking, the reason for this trip and they will be the reason for the next. Those who have been so seduced choose a route to paddle, rather than choose to paddle a route.

WEST TASMAN BAY

We paddled on the next day in silky seas, past impressive rock formations and on around Separation Point into Tasman Bay. Known for its rough seas, the only movements around the point were from a noisy seal, sweeping terns and a little blue penguin. We paddled fast and with tempo, driven by a lust for cappuccino and were soon strolling up the path to Awaroa cafe. Back on the beach we took up our usual positions, Maria in the sun and myself in the shade, when the sea breeze started building up rapidly. We crash launched to round Awaroa Head before being weathered in. Once around, the wind strengthened further and we rode it through, reaching Tonga Island in no time. A boat full of snorkelling seal watchers were out of luck - only one seal in the water. We swept on with following seas, a few support strokes and extensive rudder work giving an exhilarating ride, through the Mad Mile and into the shelter of the Astrolabe Roadstead. The sheltered coast there was plagued by campers, every beach taken with fizz boats, yachts, kayaks and bodies. For peace

and quiet we headed to Fisherman's Island, helped on our way by more tailwinds. The beautiful sheltered beach there had a fine wooden yacht moored offshore, but at least such vessels are the least of tourist evils.

In one easy day we had paddled the length of the Abel Tasman park, the destination of so many kayakers for multi-day trips. The winds continued rising, so out came the tent, obediently pitched away from the "No camping" sign. Maria dragged me into it.

Next morning we headed off towards Ruby Bay, barely discernible on the horizon, steering well clear of the tourist haven of Kaiteriteri and the sand shallows south of it. We paddled for five hours, made epic as we'd forgotten to separate out our play lunch.

Most of the time we paddled in silence, each enjoying the surroundings. That morning we also debated and chose the Klepper's name: she had started the trip without one. Just before the trip I had an unusual and childish dream, of having a faithful little blue fox as a pet, surely prophetic. The name *Blue Fox* stuck, being so appropriate in colour and cunningness. Perhaps, more properly, she should be a vixen, but vulpine feminists will have to accept the generic.

We trolled a jig as we paddled, just in case. Off Ruby Bay, terns were feeding out to sea. As custodian of the rudder I steered the *Blue Fox* for them and put on the speed. Maria wondering what was going on, until I pulled in a plump kahawai. We pulled in at Ruby Bay for pan fried fish and a rest on the pebble shore of the hippie commune. Lunch was again cut short by rising winds and we headed on for the shelter of Rabbit Island.

We could hear the breakers guarding Mapua from afar. Negotiating the deep channel, the flood tide catapulted us through the horrendous guardian breakers into the inlet. Just inside, all was calm, sun and gaiety, the holiday campers, fizz-boat joy-riders and swimmers. Normally worth avoiding, the scene appealed in its total contrast to the harsh gray world of the bay. Salt encrusted and adrenaline enriched, we relaxed at Mapua cafe: a beer for me, a tonic for Maria. I ordered two ports to toast the *Blue Fox's* new name: luckily, Maria's self control lasted.

We headed behind Rabbit Island to camp on the appropriately named Bird Island, idyllic once we had carried our evening loads through the mudbanks and once the water skiers had returned to their televisions.

NELSON TO FRENCH PASS

The morning paddle to Nelson around the back of Rabbit Island was like no other. A cold swirling mist had descended, reducing visibility to about 200 yards. The inlet with its waterways, many flat islands and prominent trees emerging out of then fading into the mist was serenely eerie. We saw many shags and white herons, but more maemaes than ducks. The compass had its first use, but even so, navigating the channels was hit and miss: we were blocked once by an experimental seaweed station.

By the time we left the shelter of Rabbit Island, there was a fair northerly blowing. The aerial photographs were invaluable in finding the deep channel, which we followed out, successfully negotiating a clear route through the gauntlet of monstrous breaking surf. So started our journey up the east side of Tasman Bay, the most exposed coast of the route.

In Nelson harbour we met with Maria's parents, armed with muffins, a brew and a resupply of oat bars. In the big smoke we re-stocked with a few fresh rations and

lunched in luxury at the Boatshed Cafe. The faithful *Blue Fox* waited patiently for us on the sailing club ramp, a tiny patch of blue and gray against the harbourscape.

While we were in Nelson the wind dropped to nothing, but as soon as we started it rose again: 5, 10, 15, 20 knots, as we grunted against it. Opposite the village of Glenduan we hardly seemed to be moving at all: I had to line up telephone poles to detect any advance. Eventually we found ourselves amongst the white rocks and crashing surf of Ataata Point, squinting into the spray towards Pepin Island, trying to make out the best camp spot. We found a dark, rocky cove set just back from the turbulent western tip, nicely sheltered from the northerly, with fresh water, but some small drawbacks: football sized rocks rather than sand, tennis ball sized rocks instead of flat grass, and a foot or two of surf pounding on the steep bank. Still, we were tired, there was nowhere else obvious to go and this would do for the night. I froze standing deep in the surf unloading the Fox. Enough wood for a waning fire at least and our fresh rations included steak and claret. We slept on anything and everything soft: air mattress, lifejackets, boat seats and clothes.

The next day we were stranded as the surf rose, blown in by 30 knots or more, so we endured a second day in this bleak spot. A cave exposed at low tide provided shelter as a second front passed over. I broke my fishing rod tugging on a huge Snapper, which had the tenacity of solid rock. We consoled ourselves with a spectacular bonfire, but the spark holes in the air mattress didn't make the second night on the rocks any more comfortable.

Next day the wind had dropped, although the remnants of swell and surf gave us an exciting launch. The west point of Pepin Island offered spectacular scenery, made complete by spectacularly breaking seas. On the basis that the open sea couldn't be worse, we fought through them and carried on. It was no worse but, once we left the lee of the point, just as invigorating. Maria successfully managed her first pee in the boat, but the manoeuvring involved made her seasick, so we stopped for recuperation and lunch at the delightful Hori bay.

A youth high in the bush climbed down to join two more fishing below and all three left quickly carrying very basic fishing gear. Maria the hippie reckoned that fishing was the excuse, cultivation the reason.

After two hours the wind dropped, but by the time we had launched it had risen again. We carried on north east anyway, our next objective Cape Soucis at the mouth of Croisilles Harbour. We didn't quite make it. The wind veered to the northwest and encouraged a side on 2 metre chop, breaking occasionally. The *Blue Fox* and I were enjoying it, but Maria turned green, so we took the first turning to the right and found ourselves in the wide and sandy Oananga Bay, with a big surf running. We headed for the middle of the sandiest part, sprinting the finish. The *Blue Fox* didn't even think about broaching and slid gracefully to a halt on the soft, flat sand. The tide was out and we had a lengthy carry to the high tide mark.

Apart from the pounding surf, Oananga bay was perfect a long crescent of golden sand, bounded by rocky points, backed with rolling tussock and mature Manuka. Deserted, too. We made camp on a raised sand plateau, amongst a maze of driftwood. It was blisteringly hot and we erected the tent to shade vulnerable items, such as the cameras and me. We explored inland, finding a classic driftwood bach in the shade of large firs. That night was New Year's Eve and the party was down at the tent.

The east coast of Tasman Bay is exposed to the prevailing nor'westerly winds and swells: negotiating it is the trickiest part of the route. There is no alternative, so one has to move by bounds as the weather allows. Bay by bay, we were fighting our way up this beautiful and little frequented coast and would soon be in the lee of D'Urville Island.

The west coast of D'Urville Island is even more exposed. With a strong northwesterly pattern forecast, we ruled out adding a circuit, which would anyway have been marginal on time.

At dawn it was crystal clear outside, so much so that, until I emerged from the tent enough to see land, I thought all was mist. Coffee for two, oat bar for me, cigarette for Maria and we were ready to go. On a glassy sea we rounded Point Soucis into the first rays of the morning sun and continued on across the wide mouth of Croisilles Harbour, alluring in the soft morning light. The wind freshened, veered to the west and the swell built up remarkably quickly. Maria wanted a pee but didn't want to risk a balancing act in those seas, so we popped in behind the next point to obtain relief. Three fluffy gull chicks looked on from atop a pinnacle.

After a few more miles of great surfing, Maria turned green again, so we pulled into the shelter of Okuri Bay. Rest and seafood bisque saw her right and Maria the mermaid was soon perched cheerfully on a rock, wearing her wide brimmed hat, which she would have felt naked without. By then the winds had dropped to nothing and so the third leg of the day commenced.

That morning I had been wondering whether to tackle French Pass on the 2pm slack turning against us, or wait for the 8pm slack turning with us, the latter being the generally recommended approach. Delayed by our two unexpected stops, we decided to head for the pass while the going was good, waiting there for a few hours to nip through to Elmslie Bay in the evening. We paddled on beautiful glassy seas, the morning's swell having flattened as fast as it had arisen. In mid-channel, approaching French Pass, I phoned my parents in England, who are a little behind the times, to wish them a happy New Year. We realised that we had inadvertently made excellent time when we saw, from a mile off French Pass, the silhouettes of four kayakers negotiating it. It was ten minutes past the scheduled end of slack and we sprinted. Two fishing boats remained reassuringly in mid-pass as we raced through on full throttle and circled wide to the safety of Elmslie Bay: New Zealand's most treacherous pass taken on the fly.

Elmslie Bay was a picture postcard image of blue sea, golden sand and moored boats, made ugly by the tents, tourists and cars. We beached for water and raided the basic shop.

THE SOUNDS

After a biscuit frenzy on the beach, we paddled off towards Clay Point, the northernmost tip of the mainland Marlborough Sounds, on a glorious evening. Spying a promising looking camp spot, Maria suddenly fatigued and my arms didn't object when we decided to head in. The chosen spot turned out excellent, a narrow beach of small pebbles, a sufficiently raised grassy platform behind, with a fine tent spot under a cabbage tree.

The south end of the beach curved out to a point and must act as a wind trap for there was a frightening amount of rubbish: as much drift plastic as drift wood, mostly broken containers and lids, but also netting, food bags, a flower pot, assorted tubes

and pipes, a soap tray, a foam float and expanded polystyrene. Such is the lot of the modern explorer.

We so enjoyed the comfort of the first soft grass of the trip that we didn't emerge until late and then to strong nor'westers. We spent the day hoping that the winds would drop, with Maria "just practicing being a lady of leisure". By mid afternoon the wind was still blowing a tiresome 20 to 25 knots, but we decided to go anyway - we could always turn back. By the time we were on the water, the wind had dropped to a comfortable 15 knots. The shore being steeply shelved and straight for once, we paddled in close, eyes turned right to admire the rockscapes. The winds freshened, the seas rose and our eyes swung left onto the incoming breakers.

A right turn saw us surfing down two huge waves across the line of Clay Point. Tremendous winds whistling through a gap in the point drove spray in violent vortexes. An impressive vista of rugged, barren, stern heads and outlying islands and the jagged pinnacles of rock reefs projecting off them. A solitary gannet soared and plunged in the bleak expanse of ocean.

We settled into a breakneck, wind-and surf-assisted paddle. The stern of the boat lifted to herald the arrival of each free ride. Once a huge wave rose high above us and had us both frozen, eyes glued over our left shoulders onto it, but this mother of all local waves slid harmlessly away. We reached Paparoa Point in no time at all and surfed into the shelter of it on a series of gentle giants, huge glassy swells refracted around the point

We were greeted with a dramatically stern and sombre view of the entrance to Pelorus Sound: steep cliffs running into an ominously black skyscape, slopes clear felled and eroding, the whole dark and foreboding. Ahead of us, the water foamed and two williwaws sped across the Sound. Although early in the evening, it was already getting dark. We opted for the nearest camp site, in Port Ligar. Approaching the Port's mouth from the calm of the headland's lee, violent gusts of wind buffeted us, tearing the map case from my lap. We stowed it inside and battened down all hatches. Even so prepared, we were taken aback by the vehemence of conditions in Port Ligar itself: forty knots or more, raising a vicious short breaking chop, dramatically reversing the old maxim of any port in a storm. We fought our way in, yard by yard, stroke by stroke, gradually passing the sharply mussel'd rocks of the point itself and the buoys of the mussel farms, barely visible through the spray. Eventually we arrived at Fishing Bay, a splendid grassy spot offering - we discovered once the storm abated - a tremendous view down Pelorus Sound.

A short but exhilarating and memorably variable paddle - side on chop, huge following seas, glassy swells, sheltered calm and a whistling holocaust, all in about six miles. As the shag flies, we were only two miles from our previous camp site on the other side of the peninsula.

With a southerly forecast providing little incentive, we slept in, but arose to light winds and brilliant sunshine late morning. Waiting for the midday forecast, I disassembled the Klepper, cleaning and rinsing her skin and bones in fresh water. The forecast was fine, so I suggested we head off, but Maria the barometer predicted a hail storm and hid in the tent. I had nearly reassembled the Klepper when her hail storm struck, bullets the size of peas and I was half soaked in the short dash to the tent, to join Maria the "told-you-so".

The forecast was for two days' fine weather followed by strong northerlies, so rather than follow the edge of Cook Strait to Queen Charlotte Sound and thence Picton, we opted for the shelter of Pelorus Sound and a portage. We now had a whole five days to cover two days' distance at our pace to date, so we could enjoy a leisurely cruise. And we did.

Another late start as Fishing Bay is sheltered by hills and Maria wouldn't surface until the sun struck the tent. When it did and she did, she was aghast to find me wearing my sandals. I finished reassembling the boat and we packed up and left at a relaxed pace. We decided to visit the shop at Waterfall Bay to stock up on essentials, such as bread and honey. On the way over we chatted to the mussel farm workers on their vessel: knowledgeable, interesting and friendly man recounted his sixteen years in the business, moaning like farmers everywhere and every year about the latest harvest. Of more immediate and practical use, we learnt that this area was clear from the shellfish toxin ban and he kindly suggested that we pluck a few mussels from his farm in passing. We carried on, looking at the competition seeding their mussel lines, using a Heath Robinson contraption to turn them into muslin sausages.

Our chores done, we headed out, stopping at the mussel farm to partake of our offer. Disappointingly, the mussels were too far down and their lines too heavy to pull up from a kayak. We carried on across Pelorus Sound, a northerly sea breeze against the ebb tide raising quite a chop. As luck and lunch would have it, Post Office Point was encrusted with blue and green mussels, to which Maria soon added honey and garlic.

In preparation for an early start the next day, and having discovered Maria's pagan tendencies, we decided on an east facing camp spot. We aimed for Clara Island, which we knew about from Alex Ferguson's useful if mercifully incomplete *Sea Kayaker's Guide to Tasman Bay and the Marlborough Sounds*. A classic spot, with just room enough for the three of us to tuck ourselves in between the flax bushes, native bush behind and high tide mark immediately in front. Wekas rustled through the flax, oyster catchers called along the shoreline and later a morepork started his evening hooting.

We awoke to a glorious dawn chorus of chirps, bells, whistles, chimes and jingles and the pecking of a boldly nervous weka around the tent. Up for a photograph, then back to listen to the chorus in warmth and up again with the first rays of the sun. Despite our good intentions, we were reluctant to leave such a fine spot and weren't paddling until eleven. Shortly after setting off, the sea breezes came in strong, gusting off our starboard bow. My shout of "Incoming!" meant little to Maria, until the submerged shadow surfaced as a small dolphin, which alas declined to play with us: it was the only cetacean sighted on the whole trip, but enough to win me a chocolate fish.

The seas ahead were more white than blue as we turned into Tawhitinui Reach, the reach and seas increasing as we surfed to Tawero Point. That point lies on the end of a long thin peninsula and in rounding it we turned back into the same strong winds that had sped us there so quickly. We hugged the peninsula, fighting up the small bays along it against wind and outgoing tide. Eventually we made shelter in a large, pastoral bay, where we stopped for a late lunch, huddled under a bank. When the wind dropped we headed off for somewhere less bleak. No camp spots were apparent in the spectacular native bush leading up to and around Stafford Point, so we headed for Jacobs Bay, to find it occupied.

Although high season, we had had a beach to ourselves every night: this was the only occasion when, to do so, we had to paddle on. I suggested Yncyca Bay across the Sound, on account of its wonderful name, but Maria out-voted me, so we continued around the reserve to Fairy Bay. Magnificent bush, but no place to pitch the tent except an inland rectangle of purpose cleared bush. Toilets and signposts, it was all too much: we spent all our waking time on the beach. A cicada cacophony, a tui feeding on the flax nectar and later the ol' Moreporks started up.

Next day we continued south on the flood tide, with a tail wind alternately balmy and gusty. Green, silky water through peaceful country.

We passed many white and chrome launches motoring out for fishing and cocktails. How they must envy us and our intimacy with the elements! Or so we liked to think. Perhaps we should envy them their ability to find satisfaction without sensation.

Heading up Kenepuru sound we found at last a delightful, shady dell, to which Russell Ginn had given us steer. A grove of mature Manuka touching the water's edge. The sand soil between the trees had been flattened in a couple of places. A solid timber frame resting on mussel farm floats formed a table, on which were carefully laid out pieces of cord and a candle stub. An old mattress lay airing on a line. A small section of fence had been constructed of interleaved driftwood and twine. None of the departmental formality of over-used campsites, tracks, signposts and toilets. Rather, a site evolved by successive care. Although only one o'clock, we immediately decided that that was the perfect place to spend our last night before civilisation.

We ate popcorn, smoked our pipes, sunbathed, read and generally lazed about. The disadvantage of the camp only became apparent at night: the local possums were many and crazy. They sneaked around the tent, leaped at and slid down the fly and reached under for the food bags. I heard the clash of wood on wood and jumped up to find two of the fat varmints fossicking in the *Blue Fox*. I gave chase until we were all exhausted and from then on slept beside the Fox, stick to hand. They didn't return.

We woke to a fine penultimate day. I started wondering where tickets and keys were, sure and depressing sign of an approaching end of trip. We headed off to Te Mahia, where our old friend the nor'wester came in strong and we were soon surfing into the beach through a sea of whitecaps.

Here the Klepper's wheels really came into their own, to portage over the saddle the two miles to Queen Charlotte Sound. We tried fitting the wheels in the water, but there was too much surf and cross current. Defeated, we just managed to heave the loaded boat ashore. A jury-rigged rope body harness, inspired by Ranulph Fiennes, was useless uphill, as the bow kept tripping me, although it worked splendidly on the downhill. Uphill, I pulled by hand, Maria assisting by carrying the camera. Despite gloves wound with cloth, the agony of the thin rope across the palm dwarfed the effort of pulling. My log reads: "*Golly gosh and dash it all, that Maria can certainly haul a boat (the Klepper) over a large land distance. She's simply amazing and I must remember to buy her a nice bottle of perfume for her efforts.*" but, hey, that doesn't look like my writing.

Down to Waterfall Bay for lunch and to launch off the jetty and a very fast run to the Queen Charlotte Sound, a strong tail wind chasing us. Turning into the Sound we saw ahead of us a sea of sails, scores of gregarious yachties seeking the wilderness together. Truly we were back in mainstream civilisation. In contrast to the bay we had

just left, the Sound itself was calm and we headed diagonally across it to the entrance to Picton Harbour.

However, a distinct and fierce line of whitecaps ran across the Sound into Picton, induced by the gale howling down through Lochmara Bay opposite. After searching in vain for the Karaka Bay camp spot that Alex Ferguson mentions, in very entertaining seas, we ended up at Bobs Bay: the dreaded signposts, loos and BBQ table but, surprisingly and fortunately, no tents. We pitched ours at the bush edge. I walked into Picton for a bottle of claret to celebrate our last night and rolled back with a Guinness or two inside me. A final pasta extravaganza and our last night under canvas.

Next morning, two bedraggled, hirsute but satisfied kayakers carried their boat ashore amongst the concrete, cars and people of Picton foreshore. There they continued their quest for cappuccino, while the faithful *Blue Fox* waited faithfully, a tiny patch of blue and gray against another harbourscape.

