

## D'Urville for Beginners

*Sandy Ferguson - 27 September - 1 October, 1997*

The thought of doing the trip had surfaced a few months before. Friends in Blenheim, being near that area, had it down as one of the places to go and I'd partly regretted not going earlier in the year when we'd had such good weather for the trip. I'd just spent 5 months "training" my paddling partner and was confident that she could handle it. It was only a matter of when or rather which school holidays to suit our Blenheim paddlers (the warmer the better).

W. and I drove up on the Friday night to Havelock and camped, got away reasonably early but with me convinced the others would be ahead of us and waiting, pushed it hard on the gravel road to French Pass. The quoted 2 hours was much more like one. And they weren't there! It gave us time to brew up coffee, have lunch and leisurely pack the boats. That usually consists of transferring everything from the car to a kayak, if it's not in the car, we have it in the kayaks. There's probably a month's worth of food too, never know if we'll get storm bound or for how long.



Leaving french Pass village

So eventually we four headed north from the village until I figured we were out of the main current which runs through French Pass (up to 8 knots) and could angle over to D'Urville Island, our first way-point being Rabbit Island and from there directly to the finger end of the D'Urville Peninsula, pointing at us. A grey sky and the lightest of breezes.

The peninsula points south and we skirted its outer eastern edge, stopping for nibbles before we left it and dropped a line for a few minutes. With the sea so flat and having only done a little over an hour we carried on rather than landing at Penguin Island as was originally intended. Whareata Bay would be the campsite, in total, nearly 3 hours paddling.

The ground where the old school used to be is the area I now use, lumpy though it maybe (and my side of the tent was the lumpy one). We spread out cookers and food and put together a meal. The night got darker and a little drizzle, followed by rain during the night.



Marty and the south end of Tinui Island

Fortunately the morning, damp though it was, looked as if things might get better. The Rangitotos weren't too far off our course so we headed there, once off Old Mans Head, for the channel between the southern two islands. I snuck through a few slots between rocks and surprised a seal (or he me) before we got to the middle of Tinui Island and its sandy beach. Time for a stretch and coffee and to check the campsite to see if it, 10 metres up the hill, still existed. It did.

The wind appeared to be lifting a bit so we cancelled the proposed visit to the hermit on the next island and headed north to Patuki. A bit over an hour's paddling with the tide pushing us up the coast and me trying to keep Carrie heading to port to allow for it. The original point in the gloom that I was aiming for turned out to be our destination, its outline clarifying as we neared it. There is a small island off the beach and I hadn't realised that at that state of the tide there is a drying bar running out to it. Round the other side, it was just possible to cross the reef into the small lagoon and run up the beach at the foot of the farm track.

Martyn had made arrangements and knew the owner and once we found the new homestead (after waltzing off over the hills) we were made welcome and had the run of the old homestead. All mod cons, electricity, hot shower, running water, maybe not the sort of thing "real" sea kayakers use but not something any of us were going to turn down. From the cramped quarters of a tent we now had over half a dozen bedrooms to chose from. The sun came out in the afternoon and allowed us to dry wet gear.

Another still morning as we headed north, the seas getting lumpier as we neared the top, the tidal run starting to stir the waters. Bilhook Bay, The Gut and then Hells Gate and into the Bishops Cauldron, bouncing our way across it to the Sisters. On a previous trip we'd noted, and Don had been caught in it, the meeting of the waves. Martyn and I were willing to give it a go, probably convinced we'd be able to time it right, W. would have blissfully paddled through and I expect, made it, but Carrie wasn't going near it. The next

passage had a 2 knot tide running through it but flat water providing you didn't look behind to see where it was going. I figured we'd be able to punch through, given time. I left Martyn to act as "sweep" and headed through, the rocky islands very slowly drifting by.



Marty about Hells Gate

Once through we were out into Port Hardy, a swell rolling in from Australia on our starboard side and the roughness of a tidal run still evident. A seal surfaced beside us and swam past my stern. An occasional gannet flew over.

A very messy sea, that I'd been a little queasy myself earlier in the day made me realise that W, though smiling wasn't really herself. Carrie had some seasick tablets and I threw a tow on to up the pace on the long haul across the bay. After nearly two hours we neared the other side, Trafalgar Point, to run into another tide rip as we ferry glided across it and snuck through the rocks to a sheltered beach.

Most definitely time for lunch, a little sun to warm us and a thermos to turn out copious quantities of hot water for coffee and tea. We had nearly 2 hours before we needed to make a final decision about our destination however it soon came time, find a bay to camp in or catch the tide and fair wind for the run down the west coast. Was W really up to it or just saying she was?

We made the decision to go for it, managed to get the boats between the rocks (the tide had dropped) and headed out, the tide rip now running in our favour as we rounded Trafalgar Point and headed for Nile Head, the northwestern end of the island. There was

some discussion as to whether we should stand out to sea to round the rock off the point or head through the gap, W and I went for it and the others followed, it being more benign than it looked as we'd approached it and the white broken water being an illusion of the roughness.

From there, there's an hour of sheer cliffs before the next sheltered bay, the boats lifted along on an easy run, a light wind behind and the swell on the aft quarter, the sun lighting up the mottled cliffs. Off the south corner of Otu Bay there's a very high rock island and it actually shelters the passage between it and D'Urville. There was no sign of white water and as we approached the channel we could see that most of it was filled with rocks, there being a small gap, deep and wide enough for kayaks. The rock island must be quite a bit over 50 metres high and sheer.

Form there it was a straight run down to Greville Harbour, a bit over an hour. We kept clear of the island as it curves in and we wanted the tide, our course setting us for the rocks that lie off the entrance to Greville Harbour. The afternoon wore on and Two Bay Point drifted closer, eventually (as always happens) we slipped through the reef and into Greville Harbour as the wind changed to a sou'easter, right on the nose. It was obvious that I shouldn't have doubted W's stamina as she powered through it for the far end of the bay that lies just inside Greville Harbour and our pull-out point for the day.

There was a little surf and while Martyn tried his fishing line I ran in and on to the beach between the sets. As I stood there I noticed that they were all sitting where the waves started to lift, shout or say nothing? W caught the next one and surfed in, catching the broach before it became serious while the others followed, too surprised to do much with the waves.

Though Martyn had contacted the owner, he was away and the other owner appeared. He presumed that as we'd asked for permission to camp he couldn't very well throw us out and carried on down to the end of the track with his wife and kids to play on the sand. There was really no shelter but a bit of a table we could use for setting out a meal and a dinghy to shelter by. A meal was the first priority followed by tents after the farmer had left, mainly because the track looked like a good flat area to put the tent on. Martyn and Carrie wandered off to look for something more sheltered as their tent wasn't the best for windy conditions.

Though we'd been assured by the landowner that a sou'easter didn't carry rain, the forecast was right and we had rain and a gale all night and through a large part of the next day. A damp sleeping bag (being hit by the sides of the tent) is not my idea of pleasure, nor is cold baked beans for lunch.

The rain stopped in the afternoon and we went for a walk, getting back in time to sort out a meal. We propped up the dinghy to make some shelter from the wind and got a stove going. I'd admitted to W that afternoon that it was my birthday so the meal was followed by a double instant pudding with a candle stuck in it. Obvious that the wind had died somewhat as I had to blow it out. We retired to our damp tent and the others to the Chilly Hotel, a very large chilly bin that they'd found that didn't leak and wouldn't get blown away. Chilly because that was what it was intended for, but hot because it was well insulated.

Next morning was still, as we tracked down damp and windswept gear, cleared a bit of sand off the boats and packed. I had hoped to be away by 8.00 a.m. but it was nearly an hour later before we were on the water and heading south. This was not a day for rest, we had to make French Pass sometime about 1.30 p.m. to catch the tide or at least go through before it turned against us. We paddled south, swapping pairs at times with eventually Martyn and me some way behind the girls, a sprint to catch them and lead the way through the reefs, then round the point and into Manuhakapakapa, a long bay stretching down to the south west point.

The wind had freshened a little and Martyn suggested we sail. He'd had pockets sewn into the corners of his tent fly so, with the four of us rafted up, we swept on south. Eventually as the last reef appeared we dropped the sail, scraped through a gap, crossed the small bay and rounded Sauvage Point and into Current Basin. Still I wouldn't let them rest or stop for lunch until we'd passed the Le Brun Peninsula as there's a very shallow neck running out to it, fortunately with still enough water over it to cross.

A very short lunch and out into the channel as I presumed we still had some tide in our favour. It appeared so by the time we made, though as we approached the Pass, a marker buoy showed that we were late. In the middle of the Pass, there's a small lighthouse and we made up to it in its "shadow", pointed into the current and were swept away across the channel to the back eddy under the cliffs. Here it was possible to fight through the current and round the corner. I beached a bit further on and came back with a line to assist Carrie and W through the worst of it, probably about 50 metres. Once through it was a short paddle across a small bay, round the point and into Elmsie Bay where the French Pass village is sited.

### **Notes:**

This was the second multiday trip Martyn and Carrie had done, the first for W. Martyn and Carrie can both roll.

D'Urville Island is about 20 miles long by 10 at its widest, sited at the northern tip of the Marlborough Sounds and eastern side of Tasman Bay. A large part of the island is reserve, the rest is sheep country.

The current in French Pass can reach 8 knots.

A thermet consists of a waterjacket and a fire is built under it with the heat rising up the middle. Commonly used by New Zealanders during the war in the desert (WWII for those too young to remember anything before Iran).

The hermit on the Rangitotos has been there for 50 years, almost self-sufficient, making his own wine, growing vegetables and occasionally leaving to go to D'Urville Island.

Kayaks -

Martyn, Quality Kayaks, *Southern Aurora*

Carrie, Quality Kayaks, *Puffin*

W, SeaLand Kayaks, *Seaward* (wooden)

Sandy, SeaLand Kayaks/Norski, *Seaward* (fibreglass)