

VOYAGE TO THE TOP

by *Sandy Ferguson*

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Two days before Christmas 1984, Steve Gourdie, Dave Bottomley and myself, after deliberations the previous day as to the start point, drove to Tennyson Inlet (Penzance) and unloaded three kayaks from my wagon. We then unloaded a mountain of equipment beside them and almost gave up the whole idea. After about two hours of packing and cramming, most of the beach was clear and the kayaks sat bulging at the seams.

An hour's paddling against a head wind in bright sunshine got us to a beach on Tarakaipa Island then on to Tawhitinui Island where the beach was surrounded by a steep hill so we carried on to the beach west of Camel Point. At least there was room for one tent. On the hill behind, there had been a small slip which I proceeded to enlarge until I could site most of my tent. Steve's first attempt at fishing that evening from the kayak - nothing.

Next morning a grey 6.00 a.m. and away before 8.00 a.m. We waited for Steve off Camel Point while he, back in the bay, fought off the only fish he caught on the trip - a desperate struggle of man versus a hand-span sized fish. Away in the far grey distance, Port Ligar and the open sea beyond - should reach that tomorrow.

Crossing Fitzroy Bay towards Maud Island and dolphins a mile away heading up the Sound. Past Maud Island, we landed at Clara Island to brew-up and fill water bottles from the stream. Off Treble Tree Point, seeing how close we could sneak up to the shags on a 4 metre high island just off the shore, I turned to see that the dolphins had circled the Sound and were now behind us, leaping, snorting and doing head stands. When a dolphin the size of your boat does a head stand 20 metres away you tend to tuck in close to the nearest bit of rock. However they settled down as they passed and 4 or 5 held back and swam with us and between the kayaks to Reef Point.

Mid-day was lunch-time at Camp Bay in Waihinau Bay. Cloudless and warm, swimming in the clear water or sleeping as Dave preferred to do. As the lunch-time beach was too narrow to camp on, we eventually moved on and explored the north end of the bay for an expected suitable site - even worse. However not far away around Danger Point the map showed a possible place. Half an hour later, nothing! Straight ahead across Port Ligar (the place we wouldn't get to until the next day!) was a beach. How far? A mere 20 minutes, so 35 minutes later (got to be optimistic) we came ashore at one of the best sites in Fishing Bay; flat land, a stream, plenty of drift-wood, nice view, sheltered. What more, a free beer? Another swim, dinner and a fire to sit by while looking out over the darkening hills.

Another still grey morning and away by 8.00 a.m. again. This would be one of THE days with the long unsheltered crossing of Admiralty Bay. Blowhole Point, Mataka Point, Paparoa with Steve and Dave disappearing into the large sea caves while I frantically changed film in my camera then waited to get them emerging. An hour on to Clay Point and here we talked to a couple fishing from a launch. Steve was about to try the same when a blue cod was hauled from the water and offered to us by the launch's crew.

We could just make out what appeared to be Penguin Island against the far dark silhouetted shore of D'Urville Island. So, after taking a compass bearing, we headed

for it on a glass smooth sea. Despite it being mid tide flow through French Pass, we could find no sign of any tidal flow during the hour's crossing to the beach south of Penguin Island. Here we built a fire and I was, by some cunning, conned into cleaning and filleting the fish. Half each of a fresh caught cod fried in butter for the two of us followed by the clouds drifting away to leave a clear sky - what more?

Being early yet, we drifted up the coast. By Round Point I looked down to see a school of 30 Kingfish all at least a metre and a half long. Steve suggested catching one until I pointed out that he would have to handle it alone in a not too stable kayak. He desisted. Through Tunnel Point and into Whareata Bay where we made camp 4 metres above the beach on a sort of lawn in front of a bach. A plaque on a rock informed us that Captain Cook had left New Zealand from this point for Australia in 1770. We did a bit of "bush-wacking" in the evening, losing and finding ourselves until it got too dark.

The wind got up during the night and the morning was bright and harsh with a rising sea. Once clear of the bay we had a large swell from the east and a cross-sea from the southeast. Not pleasant. We rounded Old Mans Head and carried on up the coast to Waitai Bay where we were sheltered from the swell by the Rangitoto Islands. We landed and the farmer offered us a ride up to the top of the hill where we were able to look over into Port Hardy. We lunched, lying on the hillside, looking down into the calm sheltered Port Hardy then tramped back to the kayaks and decided to look at Tinui Island to see if we could camp there. Though blowing hard we had a sheltered beach to leave from and the crossing to Tinui Island was easy. The tide-rip off the north end smoothed and twirled the sea then a hard short paddle against the wind down the channel between Tinui and Puangianga Islands to a beach of golden sand. About 15 metres up the hillside was a large flat area where a building had been. This gave us a perfect campsite though awkward traipsing up and down with all the camping equipment.

The 5.00 a.m. weather forecast the next morning was not encouraging, however we packed and were away by 6.30 a.m., the wind chasing us down channel and through the tide-rip which was, fortunately, not working as hard as we had seen it the previous evening. We headed north with a rising wind and sea behind us which was alright until I pointed out to the others what the conditions were like behind us. The wind was picking the sea up like a giant Kleenex tissue. A decision was made that before we broke clear of the shelter from the Rangitoto Islands it would be prudent to go ashore on the mainland so we turned and fought our way back into Garden Bay and the only bit of sheltered beach we could see for miles. A cup of coffee and something to eat improved life in general. A climb to the top of the ridge behind the beach gave us a good view of the seas breaking high up the side of Stephens Island. Not an encouraging sight. We later heard that a couple were drowned when their yacht capsized off Tory Channel at about this time.

The wind eased by 11.00 a.m. so we headed south, an easy run down to the south of the Rangitoto Islands where we broke out into the run of sea from Cook Strait. From here down to Whareata Bay the swell was well above head height so if we were on opposite sides of a swell we lost sight of each other for long periods. Despite, or because of this, we all found it an exhilarating day. As the bach at Whareata Bay was now occupied we stayed long enough to cook lunch on the beach before carrying on to Penguin Island. Though the surf was quite manageable (a paddle width high) Steve entertained us, making a complete mess of his landing by rolling around in the sea.

In the pool, where the stream came down behind the gravel beach, we threw our clothes and ourselves to wash out the salt then spread clothes and ourselves on the warm stones to dry. We watched a weka that night walking up and down the rocks with a penguin in its beak. Wasn't doing the penguin much good; it was dead!

Woke to the sun rising over a golden sea. Could find no reason to hurry as the tide through French Pass was not passable until the afternoon so we did not get away until 9.00 a.m. Stopped to check for tidal flow off Stewart Island then an hour's paddle to French Pass village where Dave bought more supplies. We climbed the road to look down on the Pass and see a fishing boat, probably capable of 12 knots, just managing to force its way through against the tide. The weather forecast confirmed my fears that the weather was swinging to the north and west and that carrying on to Nelson would be alright providing we had time to sit out a hard blow. Dave was running out of time so we decided to return to Tennyson Inlet and explore the other side of the Sound on the way back.

There appeared to be a suitable campsite on the other side of Admiralty Bay, so, with the westerly wind that had started after lunch, we ran across the bay to a small beach south of Turners Bay. As our proposed campsite was a farm paddock, I walked round to Turners Bay to ask permission to camp there. I was asked if there was anything we wanted and as the next day's campsite might not have water, I asked for a few litres. The farmer was going to be passing our site in an hour so would drop some in. We'd just finished putting up the tents when he turned up with a bottle of water and a large gin bottle of home made wine. We did drink, didn't we? As it was New Year's Day it went down well with dinner that night.

The next day dawned grey and still. Away by 7.45 a.m. for a long day, more than 10 hours before we finished paddling that day. A few minutes rest off Clay Point, a play in the sea caves at Paparoa Head, watching a seal in one of them, then a stop at Harris Beach to shelter under a rock while it rained gently and we had lunch. Taking a compass bearing on Post Office Point before it vanished in the mist, we paddled across Waitata Reach to a campsite that had been marked on Dave's map. Landed at Ketu Bay about 1.30 p.m. to find plenty of flat areas, all of them swamp. Here we lit a fire on the beach and cooked some lunch. This made the day seem a little better and revived us enough, after a couple of hours, to carry on to Richmond Bay and another marked site. This one wasn't swamp but wasn't flat either, mostly vertical. As there was still some day and a little energy left we decided to try Kauauroa Bay and its reserve. Even the map makers thought there was somewhere to camp there. Some time after 6.00 p.m. we landed and set up camp. A passably good place but with the most persistently annoying wekas of any camp we had had. Though the end of the kayak was a couple of feet from the tent, I still had to twice chase wekas out of the cockpit.

Sun and cloud the next day and by the time we were clear into Tawhitiui Reach to pass south of Maud Island we were working hard into a head wind and sea coming out of Fitzroy Bay. The kayaks would leap over the first wave and plough through the next throwing spray everywhere. At least, with a light cotton shirt and lifejacket, it was still warm enough. After more than a two hour slog we stopped for a rest at Gregoe Point. From there on it was more sheltered though the wind on the beam made it annoying at times trying to keep the boats running straight. A little over an hour later saw us collapse on the beach at Penzance. All that remained was to load the kayaks on the vehicle and head off for some cycle touring.