

## D'Urville Island, Easter 1992

by Sandy Ferguson

Don rang on the Monday night before Easter asking, "Tell me about Easter?" I replied that it was an ancient religious holiday etc....!

We arranged that I'd drive to Rangiora after work on Thursday night and we'd then drive up to Pelorus and camp there for the night.

Due to me not getting away as fast as I expected and losing my way round Rangiora, we didn't get to the Pelorus River until 11.00 p.m., found a flat spot and put the tents up.

We were on the road next day by 7.30 a.m. and stopped for a few minutes in Rai before the drive into French Pass. A fine day and a very dusty road. At French Pass there were already 3 kayaks about to leave, Craig and his wife Tracey with *Nordkapps* and Fraser and Julia in a *Southern Light*. We said that we'd probably see them at Penguin Island and we might camp on the Rangitotos, a place Craig didn't seem to know about.

Loading was fairly quick but we were about three quarters of an hour behind the others by the time we got to sea, a little before 11.00 a.m. A light head wind which slowly changed to a wind off the island as we neared D'Urville Peninsula. We took a little under 2 hours to get to the lunch stop, about 5 minutes behind the others. A bright, fine, warm day with the sea quietly lapping on the beach. A few wasps, one of the more annoying things that detracted from some of the stops during the trip.

It's about the same distance to Tinui Island and we had all afternoon to do it in. Craig had given Don his fishing rig so Don and I stopped now and again for Don to try and catch something for that night. The only fish was the one I found. I was lying back, feet up on the deck (something you can do in my boat) when I saw a silver thing drifting a few metres away. When I noticed that it had drifted back again I realized that sticks and things don't behave like that so I paddled over and found a barracuda swimming along on its back, not the normal behaviour for such a fish and the only conclusion I could come to, after running over it, was that the boat I'd seen in the area earlier had caught it and thrown it back in a damaged condition.

We caught up with the others as we entered the channel between the Rangitotos, paddled to the beach, unloaded and had our tents up by the time they had landed and thought about camping. The campsite has eroded a lot over the last few years and there isn't as much flat ground as there used to be so there was a bit of a squeeze finding room for 4 tents, one of them being a Nimbus and a lot bigger than the other three. We cooked as it got dark and a couple of launches came into the bay for the night.

The wind picked up during the night as I could hear one of the tents flapping. The easterly had, by morning, swung round to the south east and we had a tail wind as we paddled out of the channel heading north. Once clear of the shelter from the Rangitotos, the swell set up by the night's wind, was evident and the waves starting to build from the south made a confused, though not difficult, sea. Just north of Patuki, as we passed through a reef, Craig said the Tracey wasn't feeling well and that they'd stay there and maybe find a beach and that Don and I should carry on.

Crossing the next two reefs added to the excitement a little, especially for Don. As we crossed over the last one he broached in a set of three waves. I had three that broke just ahead of me. Though the waves were steep and occasionally breaking they were not as large as I've been in on that coast and I always felt that things could get a lot worse before I would have to start getting worried.

Once round Cape Stephens the sea went flat and a light wind followed us down the coast as we looked for a beach to stop on to brew-up and have something to eat. Don was a little worried about a surf landing with a glass boat but once on the beach, realized that there was nothing to it and that it had looked worse than it was. The waves "whooshed" on to the beach rather than broke.

With a virtually flat sea and very light breeze behind we paddled south with the idea of going into Port Hardy for the night and picking up water at the farm round Castle Head. There were numerous launches with skin divers down though there were no offers of fish from any.

We paddled into the beach at the farm at Castle Point and were met by the farmer and a woman there for the Easter break. He turned on the hose for us and we filled bottles and a wine cask bag. She had suggested that we try the beach straight across from the farm so we paddled over to a nice little bay with a flat area for camping but full of wasps. As the tide was out we sat on the gravel beach down by the boats and had lunch away from most of the insects.

I suggested to Don that we head west to a beach with a power cable marker and try that. Once there I walked the bay and we finally decided that there was room at the north end on the south side of the fence which goes into the water. I gave Don the option of taking the grassy area and put my tent on the gravel just (and only just) above the high tide mark, remembering that the next tide would be higher according to the tide tables. We parked the boats above the driftwood, set up camp and cooked as it got dark. We had thought of having a fire on the beach but the wood I'd collected drifted away on the tide before either of us could be bothered to light it. I looked out about half an hour before high tide and it looked far enough away not to bother me.

A little bit of wind and grey clouds next morning. At least the clouds looked as if they'd burn off once the sun came up. Another 8.15 a.m. start with a good run up the coast to Trafalgar Point with the wind following us round to Nile Head. Once round that it's open ocean with a long swell rolling in from the north west and bouncing back from the sheer cliffs. Spectacular scenery if you enjoy that sort.

We paddled into Otu Bay after two hours of paddling. The rocky beach on the north side was only just above water level but as we intended to make it a short stop it didn't matter. A quick bite to eat and a stretch and we launched again to be met by Craig and all, paddling in, having seen us as we rounded Nile Head ahead of them. As we were unsure of the weather, we left them to paddle over to the south side beach while we headed out and on. We passed a couple fishing (unsuccessfully) and a seal basking on the rocks as we paddled through the little channel between the headland and the island off its end.

Once round the corner the coast curves into a bay before running down to Greville Harbour, about a two hour paddle. Just out from the channel there was a cave which, with

the tide and swell, was acting as a blowhole with spectacular clouds of spray from each of the bigger swells exploding within it. The run down the coast was easy paddling with usually a light wind behind, a clear view down to Croisilles Harbour and no effect from the swell.

Just before rounding Two Bay Point I put my nylon jacket back on and refitted the spray deck - this looked as if it could be interesting. The wind had started to eddy down from the hills and could be seen coming out of Greville Harbour, and come out it did, at least 30 knots in the gusts. From there to the beach, probably quarter of an hour, it was maximum power all the way with the bay a mass of white capped waves. Though the wind was blowing directly on to the beach there wasn't any surf and the landing was easy.

It was supposed to be our lunch stop but neither of us felt like eating much so we set out to explore and see if we could sight the others. At the top of the nearest hill we were nearly being blown off and the electric fence was cutting off our way north so we retreated to the beach and tried again by walking up the valley northward until we could see up the coast. Don was lying back with my binoculars saying he couldn't see any boats and I was telling him that they were just about directly below us (over the edge of the hill) as I watched Craig appear over the brow of the hill about 5 metres away! The rest soon joined us and told us that they'd seen the wind and beached before trying to enter Greville Harbour. There was also a stream not far from where their boats were.

The wind eased a little, that is, stopped picking clouds of sea off the surface so Don volunteered to bring Tracy's boat round with Craig, Fraser and Julia. They disappeared down the hill to the boats while Tracy and I returned to the beach, found a sheltered spot and lay back to await their arrival. It seemed a long time before they appeared, the Southern Light heading way out into the bay, due we found out later, to not being able to turn, the wind on the beam making it slide sideways.

We carried the boats up into the sand hills, unloaded and setup camp on a track as much out of the wind as possible. By then it was starting to get dark and time to cook again.

It sounded as if the wind eased or died during the night but was still blowing come morning. At least the bay wasn't covered with whitecaps though the sky had that cold-blue wind feel to it. Don and Craig made the mistake of climbing the hill behind the camp to look at the sea state which gave the impression of being worse than it was. Craig was saying that we could leave going until as late as mid-day but I was anxious to get going as soon as possible to use as much tide as possible before it came sweeping back up the coast.

We left by 8.15 a.m. again and the bay was easy to cross. A fin appeared ahead of me and then I realized that it was just a kawhai dropping back into the water as another leapt out. Once round Ragged Point we were sheltered as we paddled close past the rocks and looked into the caves. We stopped after an hour to fish, the others finally leaving Don and me (or Don) to catch an evening meal while I lay back with my legs on the deck, the boat rocking gently.

After catching a couple of cod we set off after the others at maximum cruise speed, Don very slowly pulling away from me. We stopped for a minute just before cutting through

the gap into Manuhakapakapa and sighted the other boats not far ahead of us. We finally landed for lunch having crossed a mirror calm inlet to a bay by Cone Island. Don and I brewed up while Fraser lit a fire to cook sausages. After lunch the warmth of the day was enough to encourage us all to go for a swim. I stood in the sea for a while waiting for it to numb my nether regions before immersing myself - it didn't help, it was still cold water, at least I was warm once I got out. There was a stream at the end of the beach and Don and I went and had a wash as we had another day to go whilst the others were heading home at the end of the day.

The Paddock Rocks looked to be a mere hundred metres away in the clear light as we paddled out to them after lunch. It must have taken well over quarter of an hour to get to there. We played in the sea caves, looked at the seals, tacked through the reefs and rocks as we headed south to Sauvage Point. The area of shoals and rocks gives one the impression that the area should be known as Paddock of Rocks, not an area to sail through and should be given a wide berth at night. There was still enough water to pass between Hautai Island, part of the Le Brun Peninsula, and the mainland as we headed up Current Basin, stopping at Grey Rock, where there is a picnic table on the headland, before continuing on to the Pass. Craig was worried about French Pass though I wasn't and in the end it was an anticlimax. The closer we got the less there was to see until I finally wended my way through the reef in the middle to go and ask a boat on the other side of the Pass when it would be slack water. He thought that it was probably a few minutes previously and as we rounded the point into Elmslie Bay and French Pass village, we could see the tide starting to run against us.

The boats were unloaded and loaded on to the cars and Don and I drove out to camp at Elaine Bay, three quarters of an hour's drive from French Pass. The view from the hill top was magical, the sea fading into a haze that disguised the horizon, leaving D'Urville Island hanging on a pewter sea.

There was a couple with a Land Rover and a Canadian canoe at Elaine Bay and next morning we passed them fishing by the Tawhitinui Island as we headed towards Maud Island. We explored the coast west of Fitzroy Bay and finally stopped for lunch in Waiona Bay. A little cooler than the previous day with no temptation to go for a swim. We headed south west after lunch, stopping for a leg-stretch at Gregoe Point before heading into Tawa Bay and again exploring it. There are two camp sites there, the southern one being better, less polluted. On the beach, one lifejacket whistle and a knife for filleting fish. From there it was a run back with a light wind to Elaine Bay in the late afternoon sun.

We drove out to Blenheim where we stopped for a meal before the drive back to Christchurch, arriving in Rangiora about midnight.

Don Currie – Nordkapp (fibreglass)

Sandy Ferguson – Seaward (wood)