

D'Urville Island Trip November 2012

by Evan Pugh

D'Urville Island is situated at the NW tip of the Marlborough Sounds at the top of the South Island. The paddlers partaking were Neville, Cornelius, Lesley, Rowena, Dennis, Linda, Phil and Evan.

We met at Havelock on Friday, 2 November and made the decision to not start the trip until the Sunday due to the not so nice weather. We had a trip meeting and talk about the planned adventure and group dynamics and safety as well as not to take things for granted and to make your own decisions, feel free to question the leader if you think anything is amiss.

Rowena and Lesley headed out and camped at French Pass on Saturday while the others all stayed at Havelock and drove the two hour trip to French Pass on Sunday morning. Packing the boats, we got on the water around 10.00 a.m. and headed across to the island. The tide was coming in and heading SW through French Pass but we were a fair distance away from that turbulent part and it was no bother to us.

Up past D'Urville Peninsula and on to Penguin Bay campsite for a break and lunch. Some of us really roughed it and had filled rolls and a bacon and egg pie purchased beforehand.

Back on the water, a nice day was being enjoyed while we headed on to Kidnap Point to camp. We decided this side might be more sheltered as the winds had picked up a tad and it was only 1.5 kms from the intended spot of Garden Bay on the northern side. We had covered 24 kms for the day.

We had flattish ground, we had a small lake, we had a shag colony in the trees at the end of the small bay and we had a division in the ranks. Dennis and Cornelius thought they had the best spot at the eastern end while the others pitched tents at the western end of this small bay. I was behind the others who had pitched with a view of the sea. I only had a view of the lake, well small lake of perhaps 20 meters across.

During the night I heard others near me hammering in pegs due to the southerly winds firing through camp, and a couple of tents had been moved slightly by their occupants by the time daylight came along at 5.20 a.m.

Now Monday was a different bag of lollies or whatever you may like to call it. The wind was a bit nasty and coming from a northerly direction. It would funnel past the point and around to hit Dennis and Cornelius's tents. It was a tad amusing watching Cornelius's tent buckle sideways then pop up again, up down, up down, up down, still it sustained no damage that we were told of.

Also the other 5 tents that were perhaps 100 metres away got the sun at 6.20 a.m. while the other two got the sun at about 11.00 a.m. (shame really).

We stayed at this camp site Sunday, Monday and Tuesday nights due to strong winds or forecasts, and on one of the days a few went for a paddle around some of the Rangitoto Islands before the winds came up and they then scurried back to camp.

We had a good size shag colony to amuse us as they attempted landings in their nests to feed the young. One of them also walked right through our camp and sat on a log with some of our washing on it.

There was of course weka as they are everywhere in the Sounds and we watched one dragging away a dead shag into the bush, takeaways as usual.

We had all taken about 8 litres of water with us and several of us collected water from a farm stream and treated it with Steripens. As we were not using any official camp spots we needed to keep our supplies of water up.

Now Wednesday morning and the forecast was still for 30 knot SE winds easing to 20 knots then variable 10 knots, but a decision was made and we were on the water at 6.45 a.m. and off to the top. We had a lumpy SE sea coming from behind as we worked our way up the 9 kms to Cape Stephens. It was near slack water and not a big tide that day so we had it flat calm from then on, no tide races or currents to rave about. If the winds came up we would need to find shelter as the first possible camp spot was Swamp Bay.

This part is rugged with a few places to land on but probably not at high tide, a few Arches and plenty of caves all the way along the coast for us to explore until we stopped for a break on a beach a few kilometres south of the Cape.

Carrying on to the small islands inside Victory Island, which also have arches and caves, we then headed over to a lunch spot on the western side of Port Hardy. Our progress was slow, very slow, the weather was calm but we had so many outcrops and small landforms in the massive cliffs to check out and then paddle through the long arches that it was 2.5 hours between each of our stops. But no one cared as they were all having a ball. After our break we carried on to Otu Bay. We had a good running stream here and this was used efficiently for many different purposes.

We had covered 34 kms and set up tents above the beach and over the driftwood. Our view today would be Mt Taranaki in the distance sitting on the horizon and covered in snow. In fact most of the hills behind Nelson also had a good covering of snow, no wonder it had been so cold some of the time. This again was a neat camp spot. Cornelius and I played a some cricket. (I still say that was a six.)

Thursday on the water at 6.30 a.m., and may I now say that after getting up two hours before we intended to get on the water that the team had got so quick in getting ready that we were on the water even earlier. "Great," I say, "job well done".

Another calm day, what a ripper as we paddled past Seal Point with, of course, plenty of seals checking us out and playing. On we went and into Greville Harbour for a break then on to the Boulder Bank in the harbour. It was low tide so the complete bank was well out of water. This is quite fascinating and worth a look.

Back out of the harbour from Ragged Point to Okarewa Point is possibly the nicest piece of kayaking real estate in NZ. Now don't get me wrong, this whole coast is nice, but this part is non stop small bays with high cliffs with so many caves and arches that people were just getting all caved out. My favourite had four entrances and a seal playing in it. You need to hug the coast and pay attention as you can miss some real rippers otherwise.

We eventually got to Otuatangi Bay and set up camp. It was hot and I found that if I left my sleeping bag on top of the tent with both doors open it was way cooler. We all relaxed in our own spots till happy hour, snacks etc., then dinner. We had covered 31 kms.

Friday we were on the water by 6.30 a.m. and we headed out to the Paddock Rocks, a group of rocky islands lined up in our intended direction. They have a heap of arches in them of varying sizes so we went through them all before making our way to French Pass by 9.00 a.m. Slack tide was 9.15 a.m. so after an uneventful crossing we landed at French Pass campsite where Linda and Phil headed off. After setting up camp the other six did a lap of Admiralty Bay and then Rowena and Lesley also departed, leaving the four lads to camp the night at the DoC site.

We'd covered 33 km but 22 km of that was Admiralty Bay and 11 km was D'Urville.

This was my forth trip around D'Urville. We had 8 days available and used 7 of them to paddle for four days. You are open to the weather but I have found the seas can settle pretty quickly when the wind abates. D'Urville is a kayaker's dream but attention must be paid to the tide times at French Pass and Cape Stephens. There are a few DoC camp sites and many

other suitable spots on private land.

Anyone wanting information on camp sites let me know as I have a list available.

You can zoom around the island in a day as some have, but if the weather is perfect you can spend a week and also explore the harbours. Some kayakers have spent many days trapped in camp on some trips.

Pretty hard to beat this trip for getting away from it all.