

# D'Urville Revisited

*by Sandy Ferguson*

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The trip started with the usual (why does it happen every time?) mad rush getting things together and buying food. So it wasn't until about mid-day that Ray Forsyth and I left Nelson for Elaine Bay. A brilliantly fine day with a westerly wind blowing, a change from the last time I'd driven that way a few weeks before when it had been cool and overcast.

Elaine Bay has a gravel launching ramp with a bit of grass beside it on to which we deposited the kayaks and a great heap of gear. This was followed by cramming it into all the awkward spaces. I have a theory that part way through a trip everything gives up being an awkward shape and size, admits defeat and one is left with a lot more room. Back to the boats - who'd forgotten to bring a billy? I found out after the trip that the car had been broken into a few days before and it had been stolen!

We left Elaine Bay at 4.00 p.m. after telling Kevin Bonnington where we were going and where the car was parked. The wind was gusting out of the bay allowing us to sit back and let it do the work. Ray's boat seemed to accelerate a little faster than mine but once up to speed there was not much difference between them.

The bay I'd used before at the start of a trip was the one I expected us to use again but we stuck our noses round Camel Point into Fitzroy Bay to see what it was like and were promptly blown back out, so it was to the bay just west of Camel Point that we retired to.

Either the vegetation had changed or Ray has a better sized tent because there was room for both tents without excavating the hillside. Just a bit of stomping on the grass and bracken. I noticed a couple of seepages at the east end of the beach and Ray left a drink bottle and a bottle that someone had used as a bailer resting up against the cliff. By morning they were both full giving us extra drinking water and some for washing up in.

The wind had died down next morning, still coming out of the bays on our left and sometimes helping us along a little. First stop was Clara Island where we filled all our bottles from the stream. From here we could see all the way to the open sea and in the haze was Port Ligar, odd but there seemed to be too many headlands compared with those shown on the map. A bit later I realised why, Ray had the map folded so that the Chetwodes were not shown and our destination was much closer than we first thought.

With our 7.45 a.m. start and favourable paddling conditions we were in Port Ligar and heading for Fishing Bay by mid-day. About quarter of an hour before landing I was calculating how far and how long to D'Urville Island, three hours by my reckoning but by the time we'd reached the beach at Fishing Bay I was feeling ready to call it a day, Ray was too, despite having had a week's paddling the previous week. It was noticeable as I'd had to work hard to keep up with him.

Fishing Bay has a large area of reasonably flat grass though not well sheltered as we were to find out later. There is a waterfall up the valley within a 100 metres and a house out of sight on the eastern point. The afternoon was spent resting, lazing and exploring. We took a winecask liner with us and went to look at the next bay and the house. The house is fed

from a tank with a hose disappearing up the hillside and presuming that the water would be better than that from the stream behind our camp, we filled the winecask liner, an extra 4 litres.

After tea the sky started to cloud over, dark looking clouds so I took the hint, rigged extra tent flies and battened down the hatches. Some time near midnight it started to rain and the wind increased. By morning the rain was driving in hard and the wind was flattening the tent around my ears in the gusts. I looked out some time in the morning thinking that "real" canoeists would be out and away despite the rain but one look at the surface of the sea being picked up by the wind dispelled that notion. Sensible people stayed in bed.

During a lull we brewed up then went back to bed - damp! Just after 3.00 p.m. there was a call from Ray about his kayak. I looked out and could only see mine, so with thoughts of a shortened trip I went out to find Ray's had been blown down into a hollow, his paddle blown in the opposite direction and mine had been turned round. As I stood and considered this another gust hit the bay, rolling my boat over and knocked me to the ground. We shifted the boats up into the bush, something we should have done the night before.

By 7.00 p.m. it had stopped raining long enough to cook a meal outside which made a change from lying in a tent. I checked with Ray, his tent was as wet inside as mine which made me feel a little better especially as his was supposed to be better than mine. Not that it stopped the wind breaking one of Ray's hoop poles, MacPac's aerodynamics not withstanding! The wind got up again during the night.

The next day was clear with a light wind blowing up the sound. Breakfast was prepared between sorties to retrieve dispersed gear. Ray's billy lid had gone missing, the billy stood fast as it had been filled with water, and eventually just before leaving, Ray came across the lid up the hillside. We nearly ran down two young shearwaters as we left the bay, they seemed more intent on feeding than on us. Once round West Entry Point the wind was behind us until rounding Harding Point where we had it on the beam until Clay Point. Admiralty Bay was covered with white caps as the wind came out of French Pass. Neither of us was willing to do a direct crossing of the bay to D'Urville Island and, though it would have been possible, we did not know how much harder the wind would blow during the crossing. That left us with the choice of waiting near Clay Point for things to change or to follow the coast to windward. We chose the later and for the next two hours fought our way bay by bay southward.

It was my intention to head for Turners Bay but by Pukatea Bay we were feeling the effects of the wind and for the last quarter of an hour to Camp Bay both of us were starting to feel cold. So into Camp Bay it was. We hit the beach, stripped off and lay in the sun to warm up. Ray went off to explore and came back to say that he was going to shift his boat to the middle of the bay where there was a clear area and grass. There is a house at Camp Bay and as it was unoccupied we hoped they wouldn't mind a couple of canoeists collapsing on their lawn. The boats were stripped, to match us, and everything spread out to dry. There was a tap with fresh water and everything damp from salt water was washed. It was also time for lunch, even more important than spreading things to dry.

The rest of the day was spent lazing and mending. Ray's broken tent pole was patched and protruding rivets in the kayak cut off and sealed. I have longer arms than Ray so was delegated to extend myself into the aft end of his boat and patch the non-blind rivets.

The tractor beside the house had had its cover blown off and some of the plants looked as if they were suffering from a lack of water, both items which we attended to.

That evening we built a fireplace on the beach to cook over before repacking the boats in preparation for an early start the next day. We both slept on the veranda which saved unpacking the tents.

After breakfast and dismantling the fireplace to eradicate signs of our presence we were at sea by 7.30 a.m. heading for the north end of D'Urville Peninsula which we reached an hour later. A couple of locals were baiting a line in a runabout so we asked them for their opinion of the weather for the next day or so. Favourable. We carried on up the coast in perfect weather and no wind, heading directly for Halfway Point and then Old Mans Head. We had a choice here of heading into Waitai Bay or going to Tinui Island. My description of the beach there made it the obvious choice and in a surprisingly short time we had crossed to the island and were paddling up the channel between the southern two Rangitoto Islands.

After the conditions of the previous days this was paradise. A transparent sea and a golden sand beach. We did a short exploration of the campsite up above the beach before resorting to eating, if in doubt, eat.

There is a tide rip at the northern end of the channel between the islands and helpfully it was going our way when we left Tinui Island at 11.00 a.m. What wind there was, was from ahead but made no difference to our progress. On the south side of Hapuka rocks a "gin palace", M.V. *Affinity* nosed into the bay with a load of tourists fishing. We should have passed a little closer and looked a little hungrier, mostly they ignored us, obviously too rich and us too poor.

The further north we went the more noticeable the swell became as we rounded the last few points to Cape Stephens. With a very light breeze against the fast running tide, the sea was bumpy and a line of small white caps were apparent between Cape Stephens and Stephens Island. We crept in close to the rocks to keep out of most of it and then into the Bishops Cauldron. Very lumpy, Ray just about disappearing when we were on opposite sides of a swell. There is a submerged rock right in the middle of the Cauldron, Ray going one side of it and I went the other. Once out of the Cauldron and heading south, we had the swell behind us and a very light following breeze. The swell didn't make it easy to paddle with a steady rhythm and we were both starting to feel the effects of a long day.

The map doesn't show anything very sheltered before East Arm but we eventually decided on a small bay which looked promising. I let Ray land first, seniority, and he did a landing that the word elegant could in no way be used to describe, bluntly, he botched it, rolling broadside on to the beach a couple of times. I waited my turn picked a small wave and headed in. Just before the beach I realised that the wave wasn't as small as I had hoped. The bow of the kayak vanished downward and time stood still as I considered the score for a somersault with half twist, a 9.8? Fortunately my boat looks after me,

gave a heave and shot up the beach with nothing worse than a cockpit full of water. Another exercise in stripping the boats and laying things out to dry followed by a brewup.

There was no name on the map for the bay so we christened it Kirk Bay after the name of the trig point, marked on the map, above the bay. Swamp Bay a little further south looked interesting on the map, so we hiked up over the hills to see if we could look down into it. From what we could see it was no better though whether it was Swamp Bay or the one before we were not sure.

The beach at Kirk Bay is gravel and rocks with very little level ground. Ray decided to take the hollow at the foot of the cliffs so went off to cut flax and tie together a frame to spread his tentfly over. I had a hollow not much wider than a sleeping bag with the foot facing to windward. Here my Scottish heritage came to the fore and I proceeded to build a bothy. A frame of logs and large branches followed by a layer of slates of which there was a plentiful supply on the beach. This formed a windbreak with roof covering about half of me, enough for the night. That and a groundsheet to keep off the dew and we were set. What with cooking tea and building the evening was soon gone.

The next day was grey and the wind that had increased during the previous afternoon had not let-up during the night. The swell had built up but the seas weren't breaking. After breakfast and packing we launched, sensibly, a little closer to the north end of the beach. Neither of us had any trouble leaving and we set course for Nile Head to pass to the north of Victory Island. As we got closer to Victory Island the swell started to break more often so we headed southwest to pass between Victory Island and Fleet Rocks. Out to sea it looked as if things were getting rougher so we decided to head for the west side of Port Hardy down toward Moki Bay, but one bay north of a farm. We landed in calm conditions and explored the area behind the beach. Some of it has been fenced off as a reserve and there is a stream running into the middle of the bay. To get a better view of the conditions, we climbed the hill at the south end of the bay, following the road up to a headland where we could look out to Cape Stephens. The sea appeared to be covered with white-caps and yachts competing in the Wellington to Nelson race. We counted 15 before we lost the view of the open sea later in the morning.

This was decision time, wait for the wind to die (in an hour or a day or two), explore Port Hardy or look into doing a portage back to the east side of the island. Our decision was largely influenced by the weather forecast predicting strong northerlies veering to northwest. With what was to follow during the next day or so it did not give one great faith in the Met Office. Under-staffed? Unattractive as it might seem, we decided to look into the latter option. So with the portage as an objective we headed into East Arm along its northern shore, the clouds at that point clearing away to give us a hot day. There were one or two rather attractive bays that would be good to camp in before we landed in Camp Bay.

As Ray hadn't seen the road we decided to walk over to Waitai Station and ask permission to do a portage. We were there and back in about an hour in time for lunch before stripping the boats of all heavy gear. This we bagged then started the "long march". A sack of heavy gear and a sleeping bag a few hundred metres up the hill then back for a boat then back for the other boat, back for the bags and so on up the hill. Halfway up we met a group of people from a ketch that had called into the bay. They

were going to New Plymouth from Greville Harbour and had given up for the day due to the conditions at sea. This made us feel a little better about our decision (not much, but a little). I had expected two hours, three if we were slow, four and a half hours later the boats were on the beach and we were repacking them. The only compensation for the hike was the view from the top looking over the Rangitoto Islands, it is worth the climb, though without carrying anything. We, of course, had to pick one of the hottest days of the summer.

The shearers had finished for the day and one took pity on us sending one of the lads off to get us a cold bottle of beer each, after letting us finish off the bottle he'd started. The bottles were stowed and we were off heading south on a calm sea. An hour later we were in Whareata Bay, fighting off the wekas and setting up camp on the "lawn" in front of the bach. The wekas were very persistent, one eventually pecking spaghetti off my plate on the ground between my feet!

I was awake early next morning so went off exploring. Someone had started to build on the headland in the middle of the bay. There was a tent structure and building materials at the top and more materials scattered at the bottom with a railway up the hill though no sign of any truck to run on it.

By the time I had returned and got a billy boiling Ray was up, going off to the stream to have a bath. I waited until after breakfast and for the clouds to disperse before doing the same while Ray went off to look over the surroundings. At the north end of the bay, the end we were camped at, there is a plaque on a rock above the sea with the inscription:

JAMES COOK SAILED THE ENDEAVOUR  
FROM THIS BAY ON 31 MARCH 1770  
LEAVING NEW ZEALAND AND STEERING  
WEST ON HIS LONG HOMEWARD VOYAGE

We eventually broke camp and launched the boats, about 11.00 a.m., a lazy Sunday morning. I went ashore at the south end of the bay to have a quick look for any flat camping area but couldn't see any. There was once a house at that end of the bay, probably 50 metres up though whether there is any flat land or whether it has slipped I couldn't see.

We ambled down the coast and I managed to scrape through Tunnel Point, poking into any crevice or bay that looked interesting. Half a kilometre north of Penguin Island is a waterfall with protecting rock arms leaving just enough room for a kayak to lay alongside. We picked mussels off the rocks from the boats and eventually landed on the beach south of Penguin Island where we cooked them and brewed up. Ray ate the green lipped mussels and kept the smaller ones for use as bait later in the day.

On the way across the bay to D'Urville Peninsula, Ray tried to take the 'award winning photo' of a kayak with reflections on the oily flat bits of sea. Off the south end of D'Urville Peninsula a cry from Ray made me suspect that a fish had jumped aboard his boat, but no, they were underneath and big. Couldn't let an opportunity like that go so the line was baited and buoyed and dropped overboard. We left it and went to explore the west side of Catherine Cove. There is no land usable at Cherry Tree Bay that isn't

private. On returning to where we had left the fishing line half an hour later, we could find no trace of it and eventually abandoned the search.

There was a light wind and lumpy sea running out of French Pass but nothing to slow us down as we headed south. Our exploration continued until Lucky Bay and it is here that an army could camp. The ravages of the previous year's storm were very much in evidence but there were still plenty of flat sheltered campsites, some well used. We continued to hug the coast down to Ngamuka Bay before heading across to French Pass village. The tide was running north but we didn't really notice much drift until the last few hundred metres before Elmslie Bay.

We set up camp in the camp ground though it was officially closed due to the drains being blocked. This was our last camp and Ray arranged to catch the mail bus next morning to Elaine Bay intersection then walk down to the bay to get the car, this he did the next morning. The view from the top of the hill on the way out was spectacular and well worth the drive.

The boats on the trip were Ray's *Selkie* and my wooden *Coastal*. The portage has been done by others before though we do not recommend it on a regular basis. D'Urville's east side is sheltered and there is plenty of coast to explore. The tide runs from Cook Strait to Tasman Bay when rising, 'splitting' somewhere near the Rangitoto Islands to go through French Pass or Stephens Passage. A trip is made much easier if one works the tides.