

## DUSKY SOUNDS EXPEDITION 1986

*It was 25 years ago when we embarked on our first sea kayaking adventure. Prior to this we had done several one day trips across Cook Strait and over to Kapiti Island in a variety of white water kayaks. But we considered this trip to be our first real sea kayaking adventure, 14 days in Fiordland National Park with all our gear packed into kayaks designed to be used for sea conditions. The following write-up is the original report done by Bill Anderson, 25 years ago - Max.*

*by Bill Anderson*

Our First Sea Kayaking Trip – Bill Anderson, Max Grant, Mike Rowley & John Craven

On the 16 May 1986, four budding Sea Kayakers set off for Dusky Sound, Fiordland National Park. Bill Anderson with a *Nordkapp*, Max Grant with his new *Puffin* (finishing touches still being added) Mike Rowley and John Craven with a fiberglass double sea kayak, *Raider Double*.



We loaded us and our gear onto and into Max's 'Mitsi' ute, which was a bit of a crush and drove all night to arrive in Manapouri by 0900 hours. From here we carried our kayaks on to the tourist launch which was to take us to West Arm on the other side of Lake Manapouri. From there the kayaks travelled on the back of a Datsun ute across the Wilmont Pass and down to Deep Cove in the bottom of Doubtful Sound.

After packing up we lugged the now heavily laden kayaks into the water and set off at 1430 hr. The mist hung low over the hills and the water was like glass, reflecting the majestic scenery that we'd heard so much about.

We made good time on the fresh water current that flows out of the tail race at Deep Cove, and by 1630 hr made our first camp at Bettys Brook, opposite Crooked Arm. It had

started to rain and the temperature had dropped; we were wondering how we would handle two weeks of rain. But a change of clothes, some good food and sleep made things look better and by morning we had a blue sky and sunshine.

We put in at 1100 hr and had to paddle about 100 metres down-stream as the tide was now out. From here we had a tail wind and following seas, so we surfed down Malaspina Reach where we meet the R.N.Z.N. research vessel *Wakakura* heading up the Sound. It was not long since the sinking of the *Rainbow Warrior*, and we had a good laugh when a voice from the bridge jokingly inquired, “Are you French”?

We stopped for lunch with the sandflies in a cove on the south side of the entrance to Doubtful Sound and quickly found we were on the menu. We soon discovered that the best way to avoid being carried away was to splash on large quantities of Dettol and baby oil and then proceed to have lunch while pacing up and down the beach. This method became common practice at many of our landing sites.

After lunch and a team talk, it was decided that we would head out of Doubtful Sound and down the coast to Dagg Sound. There was a 2 metre swell running and a flat sea, so we made good time and arrived at Fuchsia Cove by 1630 hr, a good site with no sandflies.

Mike & John went fishing, but failed to land anything while Max lit the ‘Great Fire’, which yielded a lot of smoke, but not much heat. 36 km covered for the day.

There’s nothing like pulling on a wet wetsuit in the morning as the ice is forming on the deck of the kayak beside you! But despite all the antics to warm up we were on the water by 1000 hr.

A paua fishing boat crew questioned our sanity before we rounded Towing Head to proceed down the coast to Breaksea Sound.

At Coal Bay we stopped for lunch and when we paddled out of the Bay about an hour later a strong NNW had whipped up some big surfing waves. Max and Bill rocketed off on some great rides, but despite the fun you still had to concentrate on the job in hand.

The seas subsided once we rounded Oliver Point and it was a long slog to Sunday Cove where we made camp in a fishermen’s storage area, fishermen’s rubbish dump would have been more fitting. 37 km covered to-day.

Left Sunday Cove at 0935 hr and with a good tail wind travelled down the Acheron Passage. In the narrowest part of the passage we saw a large school of Dusky dolphins approaching. They first swam past us, some surfacing quite close, then circled around behind us before passing back in the direction from which they came. We paddled after them but they quickly disappeared.

About half an hour later as we entered Dusky Sound we came across some seals. Bill and Max were able to get quite close.

We rafted up for lunch but ended up taping Bill’s “well baked” Tararua Biscuits to the decks of our kayaks to soften up in the drizzle while we paddled in the direction of Supper Cove. Passing Cooper Island, we came across the *Ranginui* and the old Bluff tug anchored up in a cove where they were being used as helicopter pads.

Here we meet the *Aires* and Max inquired as to how much were the crayfish, The *Aires* was however a deer recovery boat, not a cray boat, but after some friendly bartering Max exchanged some wine for some sausages. They were not too keen on the Tararua biscuits. We left the *Aires* very happy with Max's score and arrived at Supper Cove Hut at 1610 hr. We had paddled 33 km for the day and 122 km in total, so the next day would be a holiday.

The next day was spent just fishing and looking around Supper Cove. In the afternoon a float plane landed to drop supplies for Ian & Jane, a couple who were staying in the hut, plus to pick up a family party who had also been in the hut. The fishing had been excellent that morning, with the fish biting before the line had hit the bottom, so fresh fish (blue cod and tarakihi) for tea followed by "Spongy Puds".

The following day the snow was down to 60 metres and made an impressive back-drop as we said farewell to Supper Cove. We met a seal off the entrance and it played amongst the kayaks for several minutes before disappearing.

We paddled on down the south side of Cooper Island to Sportsman's Cove and then through East Passage south along Long Island. It had been cold with light showers all day, but by the time we reached Cascade Cove the sun was out and it was quite warm. We found the hut with ease. Ian and Jane had spent some time there fixing the place up and had told us to just look for the smiley face painted on the rock "You can't miss it."

The hut was small but cozy and we spent the evening discussing how lucky we had been with the weather and celebrating as this was to be the farthest point south on our journey. Later we were entertained by Max's attempts to get himself and his lilo into the top bunk without disturbing the mice above. 39 km, our longest day.

Woke up to a cool morning and were on the water by 0945 hr. Paddled around to Astronomers Point in Pickergill Harbour where Captain Cook located the exact position of New Zealand. Then on to Anchor Island and Luncheon Cove where we found dozens of seal pups frolicking about. We were able to get quite close. You begin to wonder exactly what seal pups like to eat when they start sniffing at your hands. One ended up sitting on the front deck of Max's *Puffin*.

After lunch on a sunny rock and a talk with one of the local cray boat crews, we headed back to Cascade Cove via Indian Island and Canoe Harbour where Cook had found the only Maori family living in Fiordland. We found only a stone lined pit as evidence of their existence.

Back at the hut the beach was bathed in sunlight so we thought we'd go for a swim armed with the soap. It turned out to be a rather hurried affair with much wailing and gnashing of teeth in the frigid water.

Up at 0600 hr the next morning and departed Cascade Cove at 0815 hr. John and Mike paddled east of Indian Island, while Bill and Max went to the west.

They hit some rough stuff but saw the seals on Seal Rock. We all met up again at Pigeon Island and with the weather deteriorating, and the temperature dropping we looked into Richard Henry's (the birdman) Cove, then on up to the top of Goose Cove.

We sat and shivered as we ate lunch in a sheltered hole wondering how close to hypothermia we were? Later the rain cleared, the temperature rose and we all felt much warmer by the time we had lugged the boats across the 200 m portage to Woodhen Cove.

From there we paddled about 3 km out to find a force 5 northerly wind whipping up large waves. The kayaks would go up the face of the waves without sitting in the trough or sticking out over the crest. We would climb one only to dive through the next. After ploughing through a particularly nasty breaker, we had a team talk and decided it would be best to head back into Woodhen Cove and make camp.

We were all glad to be on dry land and spent the evening playing cards and drinking wine. The mountain radio was set up in the tent and we had one of our best radio schedules in which we received a message from Margaret in Ashhurst. Home seemed a long, long way away!

In the morning Max found his pogies still on the beach after they had been in the sea all night. The wind had dropped considerably and we set off in a lumpy sea paddling for the SE point of Breaksea Island. We passed a seal and a huge bird that looked intent on taking someone's head off as it swooped in low over Max and Bill. A mollymawk I think.

After rafting up for lunch in the lee of Breaksea Island, we cruised amongst the Gilbert Island and into Disappointment Cove, which was far from being a disappointment with an excellent campsite, good supply of firewood and a sandy beach. We decided to camp here instead of carrying on.

At 0808 hr we paddled out of Disappointment cove past Breaksea on our way up the coast. It was an overcast day with a confused swell from three directions, not an easy trip as it made us all feel a bit off colour. Coming in through Towing Head into Dagg Sound, the swells were surging in over the rocks, an eerie feeling looking down on the rocks as you coast by.

We were all glad to reach Fuchsia Cove for lunch at 1330 hr. It was good to get ashore except the sandflies seemed prepared to eat us as a takeaway.

From there we proceeded up the sound and again met with the paua fishing boat *Alert*. First we were invited onboard for a coffee then after helping load a chopper with a load of paua we were invited to tea. So after a hot shower and with our wet gear in the dryer we settled down to the meal of a life time, paua, cockles, mussels, octopus, horse mussels, kina and wine. It was midnight after various alcoholic beverages and political discussion before we made it into soft warm bunks. Great South Island hospitality.

Woke at 0700 hr to a massive breakfast, packed our boats, launched them from the *Alert*, thanked the crew (George, Heather and Kevin) for their hospitality and paddled the rest of Dagg Sound to the portage to Crooked Arm.

The Portage took us 5 hours with 2½ return trips. You should try carrying kayaks over a mile through the bush while stumbling over tree roots and rocks up to your knees in mud.

We had a slow trip down Crooked Arm and on reaching Doubtful Sound a decision was made to press on to the hut on Secretary Island. Bill and Max went on ahead to find the hut as it would soon be getting dark, while John and Mike in the double brought up the rear. With a following sea and wind we made good time and the double arrived at "The

Gut” in time to see Max disappear into the sunset. After following Bill and Max through the Gut and failing to find the hut, Mike and John battled into a head wind back through the ‘Gut to check out a small Bay they had noticed. They found the hut and it was almost total darkness when Bill and Max paddled on to the beach 15 minutes later, it was good to have the party back together.

Our total distance to date was 288 km, so decided tomorrow would be a lazy day.

After breakfast we went down to the beach and meet Willy the Weka. The *Alert* called to say ‘Hi’ and George assured us that Weka Burgers were excellent, but we didn’t think that would be a wise move.

Later, while fishing from the rocks, Max and Bill had frequent visits from Willy as he begged, stole or borrowed their bait fish. Between us we caught 14 red cod.

Later in the afternoon we paddled around the corner in the rain to check out the Blanket Bay Hotel we’d heard so much about. We found a green corrugated iron construction on stilts just off shore adorned with Mount Cook Airline and DB Stickers, but there was only one cray boat tied up. Yet another fisherman was convinced we were mad.

Headed back to the hut for a feed of fish and then played cards until midnight, it rained solidly most of the night.

The next morning we were on the water by 0806 hr and meet the National Parks Ship *Renown* just outside Blanket Bay. The rain over-night caused hundreds of water falls to flow, creating spectacular cascade from the tops of the Mountains, down through the bush to the coast. The wind came up; yet again a tail wind and we surfed on very lumpy surf back to Deep Cove.

George and Kevin from the *Alert* gave us a hand to load our gear on the Datsun ute, then it was over the Wilmont Pass and down to Lake Manapouri where we meet the local keas and had a tour around the power station. Then all that remained was the trip across the lake back to civilization.

Thanks to Max who politely invited the rest of us to join him on a quick visit to Milford Sound. We visited the Milford Tourist Hotel and took in the view from their front lounge where we sat and ate chocolate. Our luck still held as we were probably the last vehicle allowed through the Homer tunnel before snow closed the road. The rest of the trip home was uneventful and we all agreed that it had been the best trip we had been on, 317 km of sometimes quite challenging conditions and unsurpassed scenery. And those Tararua biscuits!