

Into the Land of Water

by Nora Flight

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I remember the feeling of loss as the floatplane flew away leaving us stranded on a rapidly dwindling beach in front of a luxurious beech forest, surrounded by mountains and the sound of the roaring waterfall outlet of Lake Widgeon. This was the very head of Long Sound, bottom-most fiord in Fiordland on a sparkling sunny day in early September. Before we could ponder on our situation too much, we threw ourselves upon the task of assembling our trustworthy Folboat, and just loaded to bursting with all sorts of goodies. The slight feeling of panic at all the gear was consoled by the thought of the bulky fresh fruit and vegies we had for the first week.

We tottered down to Last Cove and made camp next to a small stream in the bush. Throughout the trip we found signs of recent, or older human sign; deer traps, wire, ropes, buoys, tracks, wreckage. We feasted on plump fillets of cod that night as we did for many lunch and evening meals ahead. Quite often it seemed it was better fishing deeper within the fiords.

We were lucky, weatherwise, with the next six days with the odd patches of rain but no strong winds. Our first morning we portaged some food over from Long Sound to the head of Cunaris Sound, via a cut track. Then we paddled to the historic towns of Cromarty and Te Oneroa, both being gold-mining towns in the 1860s. There were a few fishing boats at Cromarty, but no sign of life. This site is now having a hunting lodge built there. We spent the night in a tidy Parks Board 'A' frame hut at Te Oneroa.

Wednesday we visited Puysegur Point. Some people were in the process of pulling down an old house, as the lighthouse has become obsolete. The afternoon saw us paddling across Preservation Inlet to Cording Islands, being intercepted by numerous fishing boats who couldn't believe their eyes when seeing us, and wondered if we knew what we were doing. We lit our easiest fire of the whole trip on this island and also had the least number of sandflies per square cm of body out of all our camps.

Thursday after a bit of a tiki tour around some of the historic sites we slipped around the slop at Gulches Head and into Chalky Inlet. A feeling of getting well underway with the trip was now with us and we were even optimistic that the weather would hold out until we reached Dusky. While looking for a campsite we paddled very close to two unsuspecting pigs merrily rooting up a beach. Our campsite also had lots of pig sign. We visited Small Craft Harbour Island the next morning, then up into Cunaris Sound and caught the full tide to take us up to our food dump. Again we had a loaded canoe, so vows were made to eat like kings for the next few days. Back up Cunaris and around into the impressive Edwardson Sound where we made camp on a steep stony beach with a cave at one end. The cave provided us with dry firewood.

Unfortunately the weather started to deteriorate on the Saturday. We paddled up to the head of the Sound and caught some good sized fish, then headed back into a chop. On the return we decided to call it a day and crossed a small river bar into a sheltered landing by a tiny beach. Sunday's breakfast was a slow affair as it was a blustery and rainy day however we were off by 11.00 a.m. and within two hours were into the shelter of North Port behind Great Island. As with many occasions on the trip, I was surprised at how dramatic a change in wind and water conditions a headland or island could make - from a steep chop with wind gusts to oily calmness and no wind, all within metres.

North Point had a lot of boat moorings and the *S.S. Stella* a grounded boat used as a wharf. We made camp just past North Port, a rising headwind and lump foiling our attempt to reach Landing Bay. We reached Landing Bay the next day, but not without a few apprehensive moments. Just out from our camp we took a wide berth around Breaker Point with its big curlers smoking and roaring horribly where we could see that our destination did not look too landable. Smoking waves seemed to stretch unbroken from one end to another. But, getting closer we saw one corner that had a break in the smokers - so we headed for that. Thus we safely negotiated the reef across the front of this bay. We spent a week here, combing the beaches on the main coastline, exploring Cape Providence, and looking at the waves. Three nights were spent amongst the mud of an established fly camp, then we discovered Grono's cave, used first by the Maoris, then sealers, then the occasional paua collector and hermits and now us. A palace with tables, chairs, shelves, beds, fireplace, and dry wood and a shower.

So by Monday week the nor-west storm had passed and we were blessed with a perfect day; a slight southerly breeze with a two meter swell and none of the ominous looking grey cloud bank on the horizon. We were poised ready for this day and we flew. Getting around Cape Providence took longer than expected as we travelled a fair way out from it. At one point a capping wave reared up 30 metre to our side, which made us burn up a few extra calories. We travelled between 1 to 2 kilometres out from the low headlands in the line of the cray buoys. An increasing tail wind demanded the utmost concentration from the rudder controller. Dusky Sound was a sight we will never forget; sun and skudding cloud amongst big peaks, opening out to low hills and domed islands with the blue choppy sea underlining the whole panorama.

We sheltered between Anchor and the Many Islands and felt a great relief to be there - five hours from Landing Bay to here. Definitely the climax of our trip.

At Luncheon Cove we luxuriated in the hospitality of a generous cray-fisherman for a day, then off into the crappy weather for a look around Pigeon and Parrot Islands and Facile Harbour. Then screeched across to the other side of Dusky with strong tail wind gusts to the relative shelter of Pickersgill Harbour. A rough hut at Cascade Cove sheltered us that night. Three fishermen and a crate of beer arrived by row boat at midnight and entertained us into the wee hours.

We tail-winded down Cooks Passage to Supper Cove the next day; it felt like coming home. After two days of enjoying the comforts of the Cove and the good fishing, we headed up Dusky and around into Acheron Passage. Dolphins frolicked in front of us for a while. The Passage turned on a gut-buster wind for us, but the day ended successfully with us attaining Herricks Creek near the head of Wet Jacket Arm.

Rain and head winds forced a tent bound Monday, with an evening paddle up to the head of this mysterious fiord. Tuesday; we only got as far as the entrance of Wet Jacket Arm due to a strong head wind with gusts screaming down Acheron Passage. Gusts so strong that Bevan even lost his hat. The rain and wind kept up until Saturday, during which time we tried six times to get up the passage, had heavy hail and snow low on the bush, and willi-waws on the water. Things were getting mighty damp by this time so it was great to be on the move again, even if it was only for one and a quarter hours.

Two days were spent at Sunday Cove, a popular mooring for the Breaksea cray fishing fleet. We only paddled up to the John Islands due to the wind, but had some dazzling sun for a few hours. The fishermen were as storm bound as we were on the Monday, but Tuesday was good enough for them to fish so we accepted an offer for a lift up to Doubtful Sound as it didn't look like conditions were going to improve

enough to allow paddling up there - not within the next few days at least and our time was running out. Fifteen hours were spent on the *Liberty* - a hard-chine steel-hulled boat and did it roll. Conditions deteriorated enough later in the day to stop the men from fishing and steam directly for Deep Cove. A 16-18 foot shark followed the boat for awhile. Visibility remained poor and the rain continued to teem down for the next four days that we were at or near Deep Cove, and it even snowed at sea level!

For the last day of our trip the sun came out and showed us how beautiful Wilmot Pass was, covered in snow and Lake Manapouri with snow down to lake level. It was magic paddling across the mirror lake with the snow blobs on the beech trees.

So our memory of Fiordland is patchworked with thoughts of steep-sided fiords, covered with all the bush one could ever want, generous and hardy fishermen, sandflies galore, curling smoking waves, and wispy delicate waterfalls, with all this unfairly coloured by this last perfect day. A tantalizing memory to entice us back again some other time.