

# Where Did You Come From?

## *One Long Day and a Bit*

- Evan Pugh, February 7

Mike Bell, Rex Barlow, John Gumbley and I (Evan) were up early, had our kayaks packed and were launching from the boat ramp at Cambridge in the dark at 5.42 a.m. into the Waikato River. Done it all before but today we did not intend to camp but instead the plan was to get to Port Waikato later on, probably around 2.00 a.m. the next morning.

We had stocked up on bananas, sandwiches, nuts, yoghurts and other treats we may have hidden from each other. Also lots of fluids as well as camping gear just in case. After about 20 minutes we were able to see better which made it a tad safer through the swirly areas. Down to Hamilton we stopped at the boat ramp for a rest stop of about 20 minutes, our average speed was 10.4 kilometres per hour due to good current up this part. On we went keeping out of the way of the rowing 8s and 4s and doubles and singles, yes they were all out making us look like a bunch of slow coaches but we were not to be intimidated by their presence and headed off stopping just before Ngaruawahia for another break, stretch and feed.

We had passed a couple of sea kayakers stopped on the bank and asked if they wanted to join us but for some reason they said no thanks! On past Ngaruawahia we could see John's house up in the distance and John had a glint in his eye of, "I could go home and do some painting", but we kept his attention on the job and he missed his chance.

The river flow slows the further on you go and we had a forecast of variable 10 knot winds so we were happy with that but it was getting pretty hot, 30 degrees by the forecast that night. Stopping before Huntly on some farmland we then ventured on carefully under the first bridge then the second as this is where in the past we have had large rocks thrown at us but no problem this time. We stayed a fair way from shore and passing some teenagers on shore, yes here we go they started throwing stones but what a shame they were too weak and couldn't make the distance. After a few words exchanged between us and them we carried on thinking about a paint ball gun as a safety device for kayakers - must give it some thought.

A quick stop at the Huntly Info centre to fill any water bottles that were empty and off again, shortly passing the half way mark of 70 kilometres. The others got a bit annoyed with me singing "140 green bottles sitting on the wall, 140 green bottles sitting on the wall and if one green bottle should ..." - you can see that it could become annoying. On we paddled, our average had dropped to around 10 kph now with a bit less current and we had another well earned stop at the 83 kilometre mark way out the back of Meremere then on to Mercer, 101 kilometres with only 39 to go. We had a 40 minute stop here (bit of a treat actually) and lay flat on our backs for a while before having another quick feed. About 20 kids were there swimming at the river bank and asking if they could have a go in our kayaks.

A few kilometres past Mercer the head wind came in; just what we needed at this stage of the game. On we went past campsites we had used on other trips and as we went past 5 people on shore, one asked "Where did you guys come from." Our front paddler said Cambridge. "Oh Yeh." the other guy said then after a few seconds

(Cambridge!!). It was so funny he took a few seconds to realise how far we had come in our non petrol powered craft.

Round the corner down the Tuakau straight into the head wind and directly into the lowering sun we stayed close to shore as any boats coming up behind us would not have seen us. On the whole trip we saw very few boats. Long weekend and they must have all been away. After passing under the old Tuakau Bridge we carried on a few more kilometres before a stop on a beach to sort bits and things we may need as it would be dark soon and not a lot of places to land.

On the water again and it was dark around 9.00 p.m. and we had several long thin Islands to pass. I decided to go to the right of them instead of the left as we had in the past in case it became too shallow in some areas. Becoming stuck in the dark was not an option we desired. Whitebait shacks had people in them having a drink and chatting as we worked our way onwards trying to see ahead far enough in the near full moon to distinguish the difference between left and right as the willows made everything look the same.

Keeping away from shore to avoid logs etc. none of us hit any object amazingly, but we did have mullet jumping all over the place and one directly hit the mid front deck of my kayak and I had move my head to avoid it smacking into my face at full speed. Later on John was to have an eel end up on his spray skirt - well we hope it was an eel. On we went the winds popped up from time to time and with about 6 kilometres to go we wanted a rest but couldn't find a shallow part to land on as the westerly wind was probably holding the water level in the harbour up higher than expected, as 9.00 p.m. was high tide and the water was half a metre deeper than I expected. This was great as I expected us to be searching for deep water due to sandbars everywhere and finding your way in the dark was going to be difficult. In the end we straight-lined it for the last 6 kilometres to the lights of the Port Waikato shop and boat ramp. In the channel in the dark was fun due to wind against tide and half metre steep chop in places made us keep on our toes even though we were in the "yes we've made it" stage.

We all landed and it was 12.40 a.m., earlier than I expected, our average speed ended up being 8.6 kph, 16 hours and 14 min on the water. We paddled without lights but Rex had an all-round light on a pole allowing us to regroup and we all had torches handy if they were needed. We could see each other up to around 100 metres away in the dark if they were paddling but if they were stopped, perhaps 50 metres. I drank 4 litres of fluid, Rex drank 8 litres during the day. We had dropped off my van the day before and I had found a nice old fella had kept an eye on it so I collected it quietly at about 1.00 a.m. for me to sleep in while the others put up tents etc. A few hours sleep and off to Mercer for a big bad breakfast.

Any injuries you may ask during a paddle of this distance? Well not to mention names, but one had a very sore heel (ongoing problem), one had a very sore back until our long tea break then it came right and one ended up with a bad rash around the upper leg area - you know right up near the top there, bit of bad luck that. Everyone paddled on without moans or groans but before the trip we had agreed if someone became knackered or had a non life threatening injury during the trip they would have to stop and camp while the rest carried on, so that worked!