

A SIX DAY ADVENTURE ON THE NORTHLAND COAST

JOHN HOTHAM

Sunday November 13: Our team of 5 paddlers invaded Little English Bay in the Bay of Islands with food, equipment, tents, etc for a one-week paddle. How would all this fit into the boats? If it does, how will we lift them? Fortunately, we managed both and were able to begin paddling for Cape Wiriwiki at noon. A 12 knot following wind prompted Roscoe to have an attempt at launching his parafoil kite specially made (at great cost) to tow his kayak. We paddled through the offshore volcanic outcrops in the bay and enjoyed their rugged beauty.

At 3.10pm we pulled into a sheltered bay and were a little concerned as we had expected Roscoe to have come flashing past by this time. Colin finally spotted him a mere dot on the horizon about a mile out to sea; he had not seen us in the bay and had paddled past. Our various efforts to attract his attention failed until Peter produced an aerosol-powered hooter. After a number of blasts on this we saw Roscoe acknowledge and thankfully turn in our direction. He had found that the big foil was a lot stronger than he had anticipated but shortly after lunch the wind dropped right away. He decided to leave it at Paihia and become a full time paddler again.

We rounded Cape Wiriwiki. The wind by now had gone around and was a northerly of 15 knots and we had to contend with sloppy swells after the protection of the bay that we had enjoyed earlier. Two miles west of the Cape we decided to call it a day but were a little worried to find that the bay that we were making for was ringed with large breakers. Heavily laden kayaks are not really ideal for running down steep breakers and Pelham and Roscoe were capsized during the landing, although in fairness to Roscoe, he had landed safely and was having a second run.

A delightful campsite with white sand, fresh water, and even a block barbecue greeted us. Peter was duty cook and a wonderful Swiss meal was followed by Caramel Cofli - the boys were well satisfied! Lulled to sleep by the sound of the surf.

Monday November 14: Dawn saw a clear morning, a quick breakfast which included bacon and eggs for Roscoe and Peter, and we were away at 7.45am. Destination was Matauri Bay (the Cavellis Islands could be seen in the distance at around 18 miles direct). We took a longer route, following the coastline which had some beautiful rock outcrops and clear blue water. We stayed just outside the surfline.

At 1700 we pulled into Matauri Bay, treated ourselves to ice creams, bought extra film and paddled on parallel to the Cavelli Islands to the little secluded bay owned by Doug Myers, the Beer Baron. The bay was so inviting that we just could not pass and agreed that we would ask permission to camp on the beach in front of this lovely weekend retreat. Nobody was at home and we figured that as we had drunk our fair share of Lion in our time, Doug wouldn't mind. We slept with peacocks singing in the background - great!

Tuesday November 15: Woke to calm seas and the prospect of paddling onto Whangaroa Harbour and Tauranga Bay - some breathtaking coastline lay in between. Passing Flat Rock with Stevenson's Island in sight we headed west. In the distance we could see the entrance to Whangaroa Harbour. Sea caves became the

outstanding feature of this day. The coastline rock strata had changed, it was similar to the Waitakares at Whatapu and subject to erosion of weak spots from the sea. A number of the caves were massive. We were able to paddle in some and pick our way through the darkness to emerge at another exit. We did not know it then but the grand-daddy of caves was still to be discovered!

We had morning tea on another island off Tauranga Bay and were treated to a series of broken-wing antics by a little sea tern who was attempting to draw us away from a hidden nest and two brown speckled eggs.

During this diversion the sea got up and as we moved on the wind had risen to 15-20 knots so that concentration was required rounding the headland into Whangaroa Harbour. The towering cliffs were ringed with foam from white capped waves crashing into them. This made for a spectacular entrance. The shelter of this magnificent harbour provided a spectacular contrast - calm sunny waters with the ever present tuis singing - struggling to stay upright one minute, sunbathing the next - crazy!

After lunch we walked to the hilltop at the heads overlooking the harbour. The view takes in the entire area; so peaceful that it is hard to imagine that an incident such as the massacre of the crew of the Boyd actually took place there.

On leaving the Harbour, Roscoe noticed a narrow crack in the solid rock wall, he poked the nose of his Puffin in and then disappeared. We paddled on. Some distance later Roscoe emerged just behind us yelling shrilly. We went back and Roscoe, whose enthusiasm was always contagious anyway, could not be contained. "Just wait until you guys see this one!" The five of us paddled into the gloom, a corridor ranging from 6m wide and down at times to 2m ran in darkness for 100m or more. You could see the distant light at the far end as the canoes slid through this amazing dark passage. The walls were wet and dark and fortunately the water deep enough; grounding in there, or worse, would not be on my list of "things to do today".

We arrived at Taupo Bay at 1700 all slightly jaded and chatted to the friendly locals who gave us delicious tangellos and water which was running low. We carried 8-10 litres each. Refreshed, we pushed west to Camp Bay - aptly named as it provided our best campsite to date. We all agreed that if we were given the means of providing an ideal bay and campsite with everything, then this was how it would finish up looking. Again the sopunds of muted surf lulled us to sleep.

Wednesday November 16: A calm grey day greeted us at 0600. Pelham had already rekindled the previous night's monster fire and its orange glow looked inviting in the cool morning. Launching at 0800 we headed north towards Doubtless Bay. The question would be whether to cut straight across the 6 mile mouth to the Bay or be forced by the weather to go in and be faced with almost two days following a relatively uninteresting coastline with some surf beaches. We reached the mouth of the Bay at 1215. A cray fisherman told us that the wind was going to change from the west to a north easterly - just what we didn't want - and that it would lift to around 20 knots.

Our party was a little weary as we pulled into a small boulder beach at Berghan Point, surrounded by huge cliffs to have lunch and make a decision. A swim in the crystal clear water, a cup of tea, and a quick lunch and we were revived. The other side did not look nearly so far away. The wind was around 15 knots and had gone to the North east. The decision was made to cross and it was agreed that we would all raft up in one hour to have a break.

The crossing of this six mile stretch took us two hours. We paddled quietly into a stiff wind which was not quite head-on. Large flocks of gannets dived on

schools of fish in numerous places and penguins which we saw continually on this trip were almost oblivious to us still fishing when we were within feet of them. Roscoe continually expressed his disappointment at not seeing any sharks but the rest of us were not complaining.

Passing Knuckle Point on the northern side of Doubtless Bay we encountered large swells breaking against the cliffs and very broken seas caused by the bounceback. At 1700 we wearily paddled into the Matai Bay which is almost fully enclosed from the seas with beautiful white sandy beaches. It looks more like a large lake than a salt water bay.

Thursday November 17: An 0800 start from the sheltered Matai Bay set the trend for the rest of the day. Peter was sitting in four feet of water securing his spray-deck when a stingray that Colin estimated at 5 feet from tip to tip of its wings passed under his boat. Peter thought initially that it was his own shadow until it quietly moved away into deeper water.

As we moved out into the open sea it was obvious how sheltered our bay had been. The wind was 15-20 knots north easterly and the large swells coming in from the open sea and crashing onto the cliffs were sending bounceback waves up to 5 feet high more than 200m out from the cliffs. We stayed grouped as we paddled our way to Cape Karikari complete with its lighthouse just peeping over the cliff face.

Rounding the Cape into the greater Rangaunu Bay brought a startling contrast. The dark blue sea, white foam and large seas just turned off as we paddled into sheltered flat limey-green water backed by pure white sand dunes - a most welcome sight. We relaxed and had morning tea in a picture book bay to the east of Whale Island after our run down the coast. Paddling parallel to the white beaches on such beautiful water was indeed a joyous experience and the miles just slid by. We reached the camping ground at Karikari Bay at 1210 and felt we should land as our water was down to around one litre per person. The camp owners were most friendly giving us some local history, water and a one-day-old paper.

After lunch in the dunes we headed towards Mount Puheke where we intended having an early afternoon - this was not to be however. Half way to the mountain the ever playful Roscoe was catching swells and surfing in towards the beach - suddenly he yelled "Stingray!" and then two octaves higher, "Shark!". We all looked doubtfully at Roscoe who was less than 25 feet from the shore, in six feet of water. Colin paddled towards him and said that there were two of them. Peter and I joined them and it was an eerie experience to have these two large, dark creatures directly under your boat. They seemed to move slowly away as the canoes approached them. I got my waterproof camera out and as one of the sharks passed at less than 10 feet away and 4 feet down, put the camera underwater and clicked ... I will write the rest of this account with my other hand! This was to be just the start; sharks started appearing from all directions, some of them large. I hopefully photographed one which I estimated at around 8 feet long by again immersing my camera as it swam past at less than 6 feet away. Most of these sharks were within 40 feet of the beach and many of them were within 15 feet. This beach is apparently highly populated by tourists during the Christmas season. If they could have seen what we saw and were about to see, they wouldn't have gotten more than their ankles wet.

Later we saw a group of more than 20 all within 30 feet of the shore. Peter and I decided we had seen enough. Roscoe had these black demons of the deep scattering in all directions and we had visions of someone falling in amongst them - not a pleasant thought. Back in deeper water we pressed on to Mount Puheke but were unable to land as the 6 foot surf was breaking onto the shore. We paddled on the large swells and rounded Blackney point into another sheltered

haven, Motutara Bay. 1500 was the earliest we had stopped and hot tea and cake whilst we relived our day was atonic. The sharks were identified as Bronze Whalers.

Friday November 18: We woke to pounding surf and wind moaning through the trees. The 0600 forecast predicted winds northerly 20-30 knots. The seven mile open water crossing did not look at all a good prospect; the wind would have been to our beam all the way. We decided to continue our run down to Rangaunu Bay and enter the Rangaunu Harbour. This harbour is extensive and our intention was to paddle the four miles down the coast and a further 12 miles in sheltered water to Awanui. This was an important alternative to Houhora as it met the State highway, allowing for pickup purposes. Departure time was 0900 under dark grey skies.

The mounting swells followed us down to the entrance to the Ranganunu Harbour. We were amazed at the extensiveness of the initial 5 miles of the estuary. The channel was well marked with red and green markers and an incoming tide and tail wind made for a pleasing surfing run for the first hour and a half. Roscoe, wishing to retrieve food from his front hatch decided to do it in the honest way - Pelham and I braced the back of his boat while he climbed out of his cockpit and crawled along his deck to get into his hatch. Colin recorded the manoeuvre. As a finale, Roscoe stood up in his cockpit, but Colin's camera could not oblige as he was out of film.

We had lunch at Unahi and chatted with the local mullet and scallop fishermen. From Unahi the estuary narrowed to 100m in mangroves and as we approached Awanui we left the salt water and the vegetation turned into willows.

Appropriately, the slipway of the local boatbuilder's yard at Awanui with the quaint little church opposite was a most fitting end to this adventure.

Participants were Peter Sommerhalder, Colin Quilter, John Hotham, Ross (Roscoe) Barnett, and Pelham Housego.

American dies in kayak

NZPA Nelson

The body of an American man has been found after a kayaking accident on the coast beside the Abel Tasman National Park.

He was Homer Martin Tiger Bass, aged 22, of Palm Beach, Florida.

Police said the man was on a backpacking trip to New Zealand. He had just graduated from college.

His body was found near his capsized kayak by passengers on the Abel Tasman Explorer, which was on a trip from Kaiteriteri to Taranui.

Mr Bass had apparently been kayaking alone, but was warned by park rangers of dangerous sea currents.

A park spokesman said operators could hire kayaks to people with no expertise and no local knowledge.