

New Zealand The Sea Canoeist Newsletter

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The following trip report comes from Bevan Walker who paddled with Louis Hart from Dunedin to Kaikoura in August/September 1986.

Day 1. Friday night Loui and I had stopped with Ian Milne who lives on the Southern side of Dunedin at St. Kilda, Ian is also a keen sea paddler. Saturday morning saw us packing the two Nordkapp kayaks. My one has a third hatch behind the cockpit to allow you to get at day food when you are out at sea. My hatches are made of rubber which are better for exposed waters while Loui's are made of canvas on the spray-deck system. Both kayaks had rudders which makes for easier paddling when you are in a cross wind and big seas. We cast off in a surf bigger than we had ever seen before; we both had to roll in getting out through the surf and I just about did a backward flip when a big wave hit me. We reached the open sea breathless but in one piece. This was to be the biggest surf to be encountered on the trip. As we were passing a headland on the Otago Peninsula a large black shark which was longer than the Nordkapps, passed under us. Just before entering Otago Harbour Ian and one of his local kayaking friends came out to meet us in a two seater kayak. We made camp just inside the entrance to the harbour, not far from the Albatroaa colony. 35km for the day.

Day 2. That morning we awoke to a hard frost but a good day. Left Otago Harbour and headed up the coast to Bobby's Head. We landed on a golden beach in a one metre surf. 35km for the day.

Day 3. Very strong head winds kept us down to 9km in three hours. Landed in the estuary of the Shag River. The following day, day 4, was particularly stormy so we went for a walk along the beach where we came across a large Hokker Sea Lion.

Day 5. Paddled out through a steep surf; Loui did a roll and I sneaked out without getting wet. The wave that Loui hit stoved in his front hatch, filling his fore compartment with water so we landed not far north to fix things up. Stopped for lunch just south of Moeraki for lunch. That evening we paddled into Oamaru Harbour to camp in a quiet corner. 48km for the day.

Day 6. With good paddling conditions we made excellent time to the Waitaki River Mouth for lunch. This part of the coast had shingle cliffs all the way from Oamaru to our camp for the evening 20km north of the Waitaki bringing the total for the day to 40km. The steeply rising beaches at the foot of the cliffs are pounded continuously by large dumper waves.

Day 7. We did a seal-slide entry from the stone beach and once again turned the Nordkapp bows north. It was freezing; the mountains were enveloped in snow storms. The day seemed to drag on and there was little sign of the sea birds. We landed at Normandy for a break where the dumping waves carried us high and dry. About 2km short of Timaru we had to go over a shallow bar where the swell was breaking and running fast. I made it over the bar okay but when Loui was about half way across a very high breaking wave came straight towards him, he turned back from where he was and paddled like mad. He missed the wake of this giant of a wave by no more than a metre. That night we camped in Caroline Bay, 50 km for the day.

Day 8. As it rained all day with strong winds we did not put to sea. Sunday morning brought the same, but in the afternoon the sun came out and it looked like a promising day for the Monday.

Day 10. It was good to finally leave Caroline Bay but when we got out of the shelter of the bay a large swell was running from the east. We kept at it and landed on a stone beach for our roughest landing to date. We waited just outside the big dumpers and when two smaller swells came in I paddled like wild. Finally I landed in a two-metre wall of water. I waited for Loui to come in and when when he was through the dumper I was able to grab the bow of his kayak. We made camp in a small stand of pine trees just south of the Rangitata River; 32km for the day.

Day 11. We were up early to look at the dumpers; they looked bigger than yesterday but with a bit of luck I thought that we could smash our way through them. After breakfast we had another good look at the conditions; the seas were getting bigger by the hour. At the height of the storm the dumper waves would throw up stones onto the Marram grass. We did not go to sea again until day fifteen.

Day 15. The local farmer came down to see us off. The dumpers were still coming in but were not too bad. Loui got his front hatch washed off and lost so I came back in again and helped to mend his old one. This time we made it out and once again were heading north. For the entire day we were pushing into a head wind. We landed next to the Hinds River. Along this part of the coast there are about 20 metre high shingle cliffs. Throughout the entire trip we had a great selection of firewood; the big rivers had brought down heaps of wood in a storm some months before. 18km for the day.

Day 16. Big dumpers again. I pushed off Loui then had to launch myself - this took half an hour. I kept getting thrown back up the beach and sometimes the kayak was stood almost vertical, but I finally made it. The right size wave came up the beach and as it went out I paddled like mad, I had to get through one more wave, we were on a collision course, it broke and I was hit by a two metre wall of whitewater. With only enough power to smash through it alone. As soon as we got going a head wind came away and we had only gained 5km in 1½ hours. We decided to go back in and in doing so I got caught by a large dumper. The bow of the kayak dug into the shingle and the stern lifted vertically, yet somehow the Nordkapp and I got to shore in one piece. Loui sneaked in between two big waves.

Day 17. Awoke to a hard frost but we were out of the sack by 6.30am. with a glimpse of Banks Peninsula for the first time as the sun was rising over the horizon. With breakfast over we were on the water by 7.30am. This morning the sea was not as big as the previous morning. There was a light wind behind us all day and the view to north and south was of continuous shingle cliffs as far as the eye could see. We made camp just north of the Rakai River. 54km for the day in 8 hours of paddling - the best days run on the whole trip! Just on dark two large white swans flew over camp.

Day 18. Today we wanted to get to Banks Peninsula. With dumper waves now over we headed north. While passing Lake Ellesmere some Hector dolphins were sighted. The water along this part of the coast was very dirty. About 10km from the peninsula we were hit by a strong head wind. This took some hard work to push through with spray continuously going over us. We landed just on dark in Magnet Bay. 41km for the day.

Day 19. Had a late start with our arm muscles still slightly sore from the hard day before. The sea water was a deep blue and the sea cliffs rising sheer, giving way to farmland. The sea conditions were very confused with a south swell and a north east swell, on top of this was a chop deflecting from the cliffs. The conditions deteriorated as we went past Hell's Gate and Robin Hood Bay, and persisted like this right up to the entrance to Akaroa Harbour. Flea Bay is the second bay past the entrance and that is where we stopped for the night. Just south of Flea Bay the sea cliffs rose vertically far above us, the best on the whole trip. The local farmer lent us a small hut for the night which was great. 30km for the day.

Day 20. We were up just on light and made a small fire on the beach to cook breakfast and to get warm by, thanked the farmer for the use of the hut and cast off into calm waters. This was in great contrast from the Canterbury Bight. Paddled right around the outside of the peninsula in good time with a light wind behind us. When we were passing East Head the big South Pacific Ocean swell was right behind us pushing us along the way. Sometimes we could catch it and ride a wave for quite some time. Went into Okain's Bay and paddled up the tidal river to make camp under some pine trees. 33km for the day. Before the evening meal we were able to walk up the road to a small shop where we were able to buy more supplies to take us through as far as Kaikoura.

Day 21. With calm seas, a swell and not much wind we made 25km for the day as far as Little Port Cooper. This had been a pilot station in the mid 1860's.

Day 22. Left the old pilot station just after sun-up and passed Godley Head in good paddling conditions. At the Waimakariri River mouth we passed a number of fishing boats.

Surfing in onto Leithfield Beach we had 1½ metre high waves. 50km for the day. Seven days after being grounded just north of Timaru we had covered a total of 215km. Day 23 saw us storm-bound with strong northerly winds.

Day 24. On the water just after sunrise. With a following capping sea we made good time to Motunau. The tide was out but there was a good landing up into a tidal stream. 32km for the day. We had a hard frost again that night.

It took three more days to get to Kaikoura with good paddling conditions all the way. From Motunau we paddled past more cliffs and approaching Port Robinson had to go around a shallow reef, landing in Gore Bay. 28km.

Day 26. Our camp was 15 meters above high tide on a ledge with a cliff at our backs and a panoramic view of Gore Bay. Having a calm sea we got going early with a good start. A Shag Rock we came across a large seal colony and more cliffs with sandy beaches in front. As we approached the Conway River the tide was getting stronger to push into. About two hours before dark we landed just north of Claverley. 40km for the day.

Day 27 was to be our last day and once through the dumper waves we had calm seas to Kaikoura. We came across a large seal eating a kingfish and Loui caught a seagull on his spinner. We had towed spinners right from Magnet Bay, which is on the southern side of Banks Peninsula. A dogfish was the only fish we had caught. Paddling around Kaikoura Peninsula there were some large rocks exposed because of the low tide and the swell was smashing over them. Loui and I paddled stroke for stroke across the bay and landed where we had a year previously when we had done the Picton to Kaikoura trip. We had covered 650km in 19 paddling days with 8 days storm-bound.

Overall a good trip and our gear had stood up well even in the big seas in the Canterbury Bight. The best part had been going around Banks Peninsula with its very high sea cliffs. Some days had been very cold with driving wind and low cloud.

NOTE: Bevan is currently paddling from Westport to Nelson

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The enclosed newspaper cutting comes from the 'Nelson Evening Mail' for 31.12.1988.

Also enclosed is a cutting from the 'Nelson Evening Mail' of 27.12.1988 on the Trans-Tasman attempt. While I have talked to neither Paul nor Bob since they got back, I should imagine that this pretty well puts paid to the trans-Tasman for awhile until the Beurocrats on the other side learn to relax a bit more.

NOTE: For those who have not yet paid their 1989 subscriptions, this will be your last newsletter !

Canoeists warned after rescue

A Department of Conservation officer has warned of the dangers of sea canoeing after a man nearly died off Abel Tasman Park in Thursday's high seas.

The Waimea District conservator Mr Harri Rautjoki said he had been told today of the rescue between Tonga and Bark bays.

He said the canoeist was lucky that somebody happened to be handy.

The rescued man and a woman companion set off from Tonga Bay on Thursday morning in seas too high for even the regular DOC or Wilson launches.

When passing a local beacon, at a place called Whale Rock, the woman went on the inside and made it to shore, despite the danger of being washed on to the rocks.

The man going outside the rock was swept out of his canoe.

Mr Rautjoki said the man was in the water for more than an hour, clinging to the canoe.

"He was about a mile off shore, outside Bark Bay itself in very rough water."

Two men camping in the bay went out in a 5 metre aluminium boat to look for the man.

"All we knew was a brief call from the Bark Bay radio to say Mr Lance Scott and his brother had gone out," Mr Rautjoki said.

"They were lucky to spot him. He was absolutely exhausted."

Mr Rautjoki said that if was not for the prompt action of local campers and the help of the Wilsons' launch to pass on information there would have surely been a disaster.

"Mr Scott told me yesterday the canoeist really thought he was a goner."

Mr Rautjoki said people had to take care in the area. Summer seas around Able Tasman Park were often worse than in winter.

Canoeists abort Tasman trip

By David Mitchell

New Zealand marathon sea canoeist Paul Caffyn has abandoned attempts to paddle across the Tasman after a second aborted attempt last week.

He is blaming "petty bureaucrats with nothing better to do" for forcing him and companion Bob McKerrrow of Levin to sneak out of Tasmania in their six-metre kayak with a threat of a two-year prison term and a fine of \$2000 hanging over their heads.

Caffyn and McKerrrow, who flew back to New Zealand on Christmas Day, had set out for New Zealand from Fortescue Bay, one of the eastern-most points in Tasmania planning to paddle to Milford Sound in about 12 days. However, McKerrrow, who recently had an operation on a broken ankle, suffered severe leg cramps, and they returned to shore after paddling for only two hours.

Caffyn, speaking from his home just north of Greymouth last night, said he had made a mistake in advising officials in New Zealand of his attempt. Before leaving New Zealand, he had told an official in the Customs Department of their attempt so they could get prior clearance when they arrived back in Milford Sound.

The official had passed the information to Wellington, and in turn it was passed on to Australian officials who made an attempt to block the trip.

Caffyn said he and McKerrrow spoke to Australian customs officials in Hobart on the afternoon before their departure and were given clearance to leave. However, within half an hour of arriving back at a house where they were staying, police arrived to serve them with a detention order.

This warned them that if they sought to leave in the boat they were liable for a two-year jail sentence and fine of \$2000. It was the same sort of court order that



Paul Caffyn, left, and Bob McKerrrow, right, in training before their attempt. The photo was taken in Tasman Bay and they were using a kayak similar to the one for the ocean-crossing attempt.

had been served on Caffyn in February 1987 when he and his then partner, Ron Allnat of Gisborne made a similarly aborted attempt.

"The affair made front-page headlines then with the Hobart harbourmaster claiming Caffyn's canoe was unseaworthy and if there was to be any rescue attempt it would put other people's lives at risk."

"With the police coming round and with the Marine Board again attempting to stop us, we decided to go in secrecy," Caffyn said. "The weather was absolutely brilliant, the boat was right and I was right, but unfortunately Bob's ankle and cramp proved a bit much."

Caffyn said he briefly considered making the attempt solo, but it would double the paddling time and increase the risks.

Principle reason for the failure of the expedition, he said, was the pressure

created by the authorities so that it was not possible for the pair to make decisions in a rational way.

"The part I am most sorry about is that officialdom seems to be doing its damndest to discourage any adventurers."

Caffyn has spent four years and about \$18,000 planning the trip. He is one of the most experienced sea canoeists in the world having made the first circumnavigations of Australia, New Zealand, Britain and Japan.

The pair used a kayak that was specially built in Nelson for the earlier attempt and which had been stored in Tasmania in the meantime. It had a raised top to allow one of the paddlers at a time to lie down and rest, and had a small cooking area.

The pair had planned on doing 50-60 nautical miles each 12 hours, making about 100 nautical miles a day.

This would have meant about 12 days to cover the 1500km between Australia and New Zealand.

Various modifications had been made to the kayak including four water-tight compartments for buoyancy and storage of equipment.

It had a strengthened rudder with pedal controls and spray skirts designed to keep the vessel watertight, both when the men were paddling and when they were sleeping below deck. They had longer than normal paddles because of the craft's extra width.

They had sleeping bags, thermal underwear and a complete set of clothes for all conditions. The kayak was fitted with a radar reflector, designed to be located by any radar-equipped ships nearby, and a riding light. It also had an emergency beacon which could be picked up by aircraft within 200km.

The pair trained extensively, both individually and together in Tasman Bay. McKerrrow gained added experience through several circumnavigations of Kapiti Island, also completing a double crossing of Cook Strait, "just to get the feel of a bit of open water".

McKerrrow's life has been synonymous with adventure. He has wintered over in the Antarctic, climbed in Peru and India with the Red Cross. He was also part of an overland expedition to the North Pole in 1986 eventually returning home after he was run over by a 2000lb dog sled, breaking three ribs.

McKerrrow was director of the Outward Bound school at Anakiwa for 4½ years before taking up his current position as director of the Arapaepae Outdoor Pursuits Centre near Levin.

Caffyn is a fastidious planner and was correct in his predictions for the circumnavigation of Japan in 1985. He completed the 6434km journey in 112 days, paddling an average of 66km a day.