

NEW ZEALAND KAYAK ADVENTURE – February 2011

Submitted by Brian Martin - This venture was undertaken by eight club members but was not an official club trip.

New Zealand offers some superb kayaking and no matter what your skill level there are opportunities for all paddlers. Jim Blyth had organised our trip and selected three locations offering completely different types of paddling so we knew we were in for something special.

Abel Tasman National Park

All of us were to kayak the first location, the spectacular Abel Tasman National Park at the top of the South Island. This is one of New Zealand's top kayaking locations, boasting some of its finest beaches, many accessible only by walking tracks or by boat. It is NZ's only coastal national park and with its golden sandy beaches and sheltered turquoise waters, this is a kayaker's paradise.

We were met by Tony, from Golden Bay Kayaks on Tataranui Beach, with our four doubles in which we stowed all our gear before heading off on our 3 day adventure. We spent our first night at Bark Hut sharing sleeping quarters with 26 mainly young bushwalkers, which was quite an experience! The next day saw us exploring the local area with its tidal lagoons, beach caves and beautiful sandy shores -we even found our own private beach for lunch. The third day was probably the best with a look at the seal colony on Tonga Island and then an encounter with some killer whales surfacing barely 20 metres away! Being so engrossed in trying to get photos we had no thought of any danger. The final highlight was the agile Anita jumping from the kayak onto rocks to pose in the aptly named Split Apple Rock. Our wonderful trip ended early in the afternoon, at beautiful Kaiteriteri, where we met up with Tony again. I was amazed by the number of kayaks, both single and double, we encountered on this trip showing just how popular this activity is. I was also curious to see how a double seakayak would perform in these choppy ocean conditions and would certainly recommend them due to their stability and load carrying ability.



Anita atop Split Apple Rock

Whanganui River

The group next split into two, with the 4 girls remaining in the South Island while the rest of us headed off to the North via car ferry to Wellington. From there we drove for most of the day to Taumaranui for our 4 day challenging paddle down the Whanganui River.

Launching at Ohinepane next day, we were soon into our first rapid with 56 more that day- we covered 38km, but what a river to paddle, crystal clear water and steep banks covered in beautiful thick bush and ferns. Nights were spent in DOC huts and due to the amount of energy exerted each day we all slept very soundly. Although the huts are basic with no electricity, there are mattresses on the bunks and with water plus kitchen and toilet facilities provided, they are quite comfortable. After landing at Mangapurua, we took a 40 min hike along a bush track to view the Bridge to Nowhere which is a must. Over the 4 days we paddled 124km and negotiated 150 rapids (classified as Class 1



The beautiful Whanganui River

and 2 on the international scale which makes it an ideal river for learning the skills required for river kayaking and canoeing). The added dangers of large breaking waves, boulders just beneath the surface, willows, snags, shallows and whirlpools certainly added more excitement to the journey to say nothing of the occasional dunking! Our Whanganui River experience terminated at Pipiriki with the negotiation of the five biggest rapids on the last leg. Once known to the European as the Rhine of the South Seas, where visitors could travel the river by steamboat, today canoes, kayaks and jetboats are the choice mode of travel.

Lake Taupo – Waikato River

On to the final leg of our trip with a short drive to Lake Taupo in the centre of the North Island. Here we were required to have a guide for our exploration of the lake and the thermal waters on the banks of the Waikato River. The weather gods continued to be kind to us as Dan led us rockhopping along the northern shores and steep cliffs of the beautiful Lake Taupo. A refreshing dip in the cool clear waters before a delightful picnic lunch on our private beach was most welcome. We were really impressed by the stunning Maori rock carving in a cliff face which was 10m high and could only be accessed by water. This carving took four summers to complete and has become an important cultural attraction for the region. The following day saw us launching into NZ's largest river, the Waikato. Jim said he wanted us to experience the sensation of trailing your hands in the cold waters and feeling the change in temperature as you entered the hot thermal waters. Really amazing! In fact it became so steamy at one point that my camera objected to the sudden rise in humidity and would not co-operate at all. Another delicious picnic lunch before we visited Orakei Korako cave and thermal park. This is a picturesque geothermal area which the Lonely Planet Guide describes as "possibly the best thermal area left in NZ and one of the finest in the world."



Maori Rock Carving

Our final day was highlighted by a visit to the Aratiatia rapids where we witnessed some fascinating scenes of the crew filming on location for the Hobbit movie. Several times a day, the dam gates of the Waikato River are opened, which turns a dry gorge into a magnificent waterfall right before your eyes. We were even entertained by a whitewater kayaker braving the turbulent waters. From here it was a drive up to Auckland before catching our flight home the following day.

We certainly packed a lot of adventure into our kayaking trip in NZ and I would like to thank Jim on behalf of all of us for his organisation which made this, a trip of a lifetime.

Brian Martin

