

Once Bitten Twice Shy

Robenanne hopes we all learn something from her birthday trip on Lake Tarawera.

Geoff and I had an interesting weekend planned in Rotorua for my birthday, the highlight to be a combined kayak and tramping trip across Lake Tarawera to the spectacular Tarawera falls.

At the Landing the wind was decidedly unpleasant so we drove the van to Kawerau, purchased the required forestry permit and continued with the rest of our adventure minus the kayak journey. We had an absolutely delightful three hour tramp with fascinating underground rivers and beautiful swimming holes. We returned with time up our sleeves for a quick paddle in the yaks before the forestry gates lock down at 7 pm.

However, feeling the trip had been rather tame for a birthday adventure, I had a sudden thought. I asked Geoff to return to the van and meet me at The Landing, while I would solo kayak the 10 km across Lake Tarawera. I had no previous experience of crossing a lake.

Geoff objected strongly. "You don't have safety equipment, PFD, marine radio, cell phone or PLB." They were all in Geoff's van! But he gave me his buoyancy aid, and I promised to memorise his mobile number, find some kind person with a phone, and call him when I landed.

Out of the shelter of the bay, it dawned on me that this might not prove much fun. Extreme southerly winds on my left were creating mega waves with surf cresting their top lines. Periods between each wave were short with ghastly steep ascents and a weird unpredictable landing. In my lightweight Barracuda Beachcomber I frequently had no paddle contact with water on my right side.

The sun was low on the horizon and I lost sight of reflections from windows at The Landing. Estimating that the lake's wilderness coastline was 3 km to my right I struggled for two hours to stay afloat, edging towards a headland, which promised civilization, 8 km

away. I knew from my triathlon experience that I could swim 3 km, probably not 8, and not in cold water.

Russell and Lorraine's instructions from their awesome surf management course, and this years Wanganui river trip through THOSE rapids, helped me to survive. "Keep paddling, be prepared to brace, keep paddling, lock your knees in tight, keep paddling, relax your hips, KEEP PADDLING!"

Frozen and shaking I struggled to shore 2 km short of The Landing and gate-crashed a lakeside house where a lovely bunch of men were having a 'boys only' war game weekend. They kindly gave me the use of their phone, shower and coffee machine ☺

Tarawera was my life changing experience in preparing for outdoor adventures. My humbling account will I hope help other adventure junkies to think twice before paddling without safety equipment.

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