

Off the map

In Kawhia Harbour

By Ruth E. Henderson



Overhanging limestone rocks

“There’s no island there” Sandy said, brandishing her GPS. “Yes there is”, I replied prodding my map. Having never paddled on Kawhia Harbour, when it came to organising a trip on this North Island west coast harbour – I had literally done my trip plan ‘off the map’.

This proved to have interesting consequences: the map was thirty years old and although the paper had held up, the land had not. Shifting sand bars, floods, slips, and farmers creating causeways all conspired to make a monkey of me and turn us into explorers.

We were a blended crew of eleven from the North Shore, Auckland, Waikato and Bay of Plenty Yakity Yak clubs. Meeting at the Kawhia Camping Ground we wheeled our boats out to the boat ramp to catch the tide. This is definitely one thing you can not argue with. The tide comes in the tide goes out, and out, and out! You have maybe five or six hours to play with, no more.

Three hours before high tide we managed to float our boats, and endeavoured to paddle in a channel over towards Te Motu Island. Occasionally we slipped off the unmarked highway and ended up sanding our paddle tips as we headed for the white sands of Arapatiki Bay. These are a strange phenomenon as on the other side of the harbour the sand is black.

Then the oh-ing and ah-ing began. There were limestone rocks with topknots of trees, there were bald ones, fat ones and thin ones, tall ones and short ones. Stopping for morning tea in a sandy cove near Okura Point we stumbled upon a stupendous chasm. It was photogenic in its own right, but trying for a front cover for this magazine, we like Frank Worsley, the Captain of the Endeavour, tried to “dispose our manly (and

womanly) figures....as an accessory to the surrounding scenery...as kind of human metre to gauge the sublimity of nature.” Think the rocks looked better without us!

In a quest for Rakaunui Inlet we continued around towards Motukaraka rock. Mistakenly, we cruised into Kaitawa Inlet. But what a treat: as well as curiously shaped and spaced rocks, there were towering pillars, cliffs, and headland fortress’s knee deep in swards of oranges reeds.

Out into the harbour again the forecast wind of a Nor Westerly 15 – 20 knots had arrived. It was time to look at the clock and think about energy and water levels. Rafting up in the lee of Motukaraka we agreed to temporarily split up into two pods. One to have a leisurely lunch at the rock, and the rest to circumnavigate Tuapa Island, going up Tuapa creek and back via Rakaunui Inlet. The circumnavigators were back within thirty minutes...their way barred by land! After a quick scoff, it was time to do battle with the wind. Pairing up we settled in for the six km slog back to base, before the plug was finally pulled and the bathtub harbour was once more, more sand than water.

Most folk then settled into the hot shower and pre-dinner drinks routine, but a few of us ventured out to the Te Puia Springs to dig for our hot water. The biting wind and rain put a dampener on disrobing – except for Michele who was determined to tick this spring off her list.

Over a shared Indian “MTR” curry meal, discussion turned to maps and way points, wind and such; Rob got out his new Topo50 map BE32 and we compared it to my 260 Series R15. Consensus was that Ruth needs to update, however I maintained, any discrepancies between maps and GPS were irrelevant - it did not really matter where you went once across the harbour - if you wanted to explore limestone rocks,



Chasm near Okura Point



Chasm near Okura Point adorned with "manly bodies"

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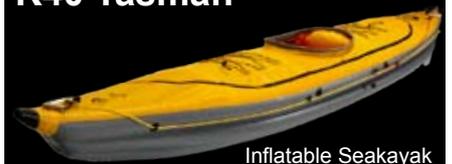


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Allison Orme crossing the harbour

chasms, islands, creeks, inlets and bays - this was heaven! In degrees of limestone - if the more northern harbour of Raglan was 'Primary School' stuff - then Kawhia was a 'University' offering majors.

That decided we then trooped off to the "Blue Chook Inn" to watch the rugby, after all, it was the weekend of the Rugby World Cup semi finals!

The next day the forecast was for a Northerly of 20 knots, so electing to avoid another harbour crossing and headwind homeward trip, we switched to Plan B and set out for a tiki tour of Oparau River. Crossing the bridge over the Mangaora Inlet, just past a rest area we parked at a convenient 'Ministry of Works' gravel dump site.

We had time to fart around waiting for the water, but once it nudged into Puti Point we were afloat. Directionally, on this day, we couldn't really take a wrong turn; it was simply a first left.

Once up the inlet we were in a different world. The land was lush; grass and trees sported fresh vigorous growth, lambs and calves gambolled, ducks and ducklings scattered and dived as we passed by. Mt Pirongia emerged from the clouds and the sun shone on the residue of kowhai flowers. White baiters busy with their nets greeted us from their shanties and jetties. All rather peaceful and pleasant; but the tide was turning...time to go...

Poking our bows back into the harbour it was obvious that sneaky ol' wind had switched to a Westerly, so it was back to pairing up and just pushing into it, but this time it was only for three kms...and only 15

knots. And if we got a wriggle on, we'd be back in Auckland or Tauranga in time to clean up and watch the All Blacks beat the Wallabies...

Overall verdict on Kawhia? - Rae and Ork at the camping ground are very friendly and most accommodating; the fish and chips shop must be good as some people had several feeds from there; and it's not too far from Auckland - only three hours drive.

An "I'll be back" destination! Still heaps to explore including Te Makia, Te Waitere and Rakaunui.

Motukaraka rock - lunch spot

