

Dangerous waters?

*Just whales, sharks, 30 knot winds, high seas & torrential rain.
Nothing out of the ordinary.*

By Campbell Thomson

Four of us, Andy, Jim, John and Campbell, left the Kapiti Coast at 6 pm bound for Taupo Urban Retreat Backpackers, with hourly driver changes.

The night was filled with the sounds and smells of a six-person bunkroom. By eight the next morning we were on our way to Fletcher's Bay at the very top of the Coromandel in anticipation of our ordeal ahead.

We stopped near Port Jackson to talk to a local farmer about our journey. With surprise and horror on his face, he said "Holy s**t, you know that's a dangerous bit of water out there". But we knew we had the next five days of great weather and the four of us could handle this trip to Great Barrier Island.

We left Fletcher's Bay at about 4 pm





and within 20 minutes Jim yelled "WHALE". We managed to paddle with it for 10 minutes. It was a truly magical experience for us with the lone finback whale. The winds and sea increased with three of the four of us packing sails heading towards the security of Tryphena Harbour. With wind, tide and waves of 2.5 metres we were swept south to Cape Barrier — a 20 kilometre paddle! Our first camp was on a steep sloping hill, but at least we knew we were safely on the island.

Pictures: There was plenty of rock gardening and snorkelling. Left: Andy proves there is no need to get out of their kayak to go snorkelling.





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Day Two

We woke to an amazing day of glassy water and cloudless skies so the decision was made to paddle the exposed east side of the island. We were in awe of the countless caves and rock formations. One cave in particular was at least 120 metres deep. We camped that night at Whangawahai Bay — spectacular — a paddle of 31 kilometres

Day Three

This was another day out of the box. Heading north I commented that some of the beaches and bays were as picturesque as any that would be found in the Abel Tasman or the Whitsunday Islands of Australia.

We paddled to a bay near Waikoro Point for a coffee break where shortly after, as Andy would call it, I had an outer boat experience. Unfortunately on the other side of a large rock, out of view and earshot of the guys. Thankfully my skills course swung into gear and lessons were learnt that day. Rounding the top of the island we were confronted with a head on gale so we headed into Miners Bay, our camp for the night. We surprised four small Hammerhead sharks chasing shoal fish on the surface — a paddle of 25 kilometres.

Perfect conditions for a sail.



The Barrier is out there somewhere?



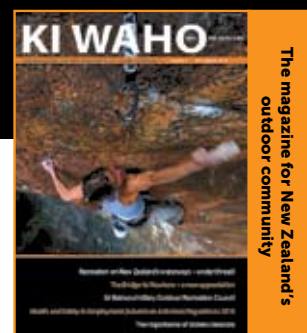
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Day Four

Heading south and now on the west side of the island, we were treated to amazing inlets and beautiful little islands. Our destination was Port Fitzroy and to my joy we found the Hub. Burgers, chips and coffee were the order all round. That totally beat my last three days of dehydrated food! We camped the night at Bowling Alley Bay — two tents and two hammocks on a rocky ledge. Our neighbours that night were friendly yachties who entertained us with a keen desire to test their audio system until the wee small hours. That day's paddle was 35 km kilometres.

Day Five

We woke weary to an overcast day and the decision was made to take the window of opportunity and make a run for Fletcher's Bay — a good 31 kilometres away. We were confronted with 30 knot winds and 3 metre breaking swells, but the tide was with us and the wind was on our starboard aft quarter. In high spirits and close formation we set to the task at hand arriving on the beach of Fletcher's Bay in torrential rain, but with a sense of achievement and thoughts of where our next adventure would be.



It certainly wasn't all hard work.

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