

# Lake Waikaremoana

by Irene Wallmannsberger



Playtime at Waihire Falls

Lake Waikaremoana (Sea of Rippling Waters) and Lake Waikareiti are located in the 225,000 hectares of Te Urewera National Park, which is the largest untouched native forest reserve in the North Island. The area is approximately 600 metres above sea level, giving rise to a climate that can be cool, wet and changeable.

After meticulous preparation by Estelle, keen sea kayakers met at Canoe & Kayak Bay of Plenty to car pool, acquire the last few articles of essential gear and arrange rendezvous points for what is known to be a challenging drive.

Access can be gained from Wairoa in the east or via Murapara from State Highway 5 (our route). Horror stories abound, about the road beyond Murapara. With precipitous drops, rock falls and pot holes, numerous washouts narrowing the road to one way, not to mention the horses and pigs grazing on the side of the road, this is a 'no mistakes' road.

Lake Waikaremoana was formed about 2200 years ago by a huge landslide, which blocked a narrow gorge along the Waikaretaheke River. Water backed up behind this landslide to form a lake up to 248 metres deep. The lake level was lowered by five metres in 1946 for a hydroelectric development.

As we neared Lake Waikaremoana and our first destination, the Mokau Inlet, the weather improved. At the Department of Conservation campsite we met the other members of our group who had travelled independently.

Quickly kayaks were unloaded, gear, lunch and valuables packed for the short afternoon paddle exploring the Whanganui arm of the lake.

After the traditional group photo we headed out of Mokau Inlet and into the Whanganui Inlet following the lake's edge. With clear skies we could see the ruggedness of the terrain. Huge bluffs dominated steep, bush covered slopes with bush right to the lake's edge.

At the Waihirere Falls the stream flows over a rocky outcrop dropping several metres to the lake below. Behind the waterfall is a small, shallow cavern. Here it was playtime. The intrepid paddled directly under the falls, testing their courage and their wet weather gear. Others had fun negotiating a path under an overhanging fern, into the cavern and out the other side. Robbie provided tips and moral support for the unsure. Estelle was well positioned to capture great photos of kayakers at play.

Further up the inlet the Hopuruahine Landing (DoC campsite) provided an ideal landing spot and a grassy area for us to enjoy a welcome late lunch. The slippery grass bank was ideal to try a seal launch, thanks to Robbie who gave the kayaks some extra momentum.

We continued up the inlet, crossed over, then followed the opposite lake edge back toward the Mokau Inlet. With the breeze and some gusts of wind behind us Dave, Tim and Estelle popped out their sails.



Testing their courage and their wet weather gear.

The race was on. I don't think there was a declared winner, despite the competitive banter.

We had covered fifteen kilometres. With kayaks reloaded and gear stowed we headed away to the Waikaremoana Motorcamp.

En route, the Mokau Falls are a spectacular sight from the viewing bay. The Mokau Stream flows out of a narrow valley, falling thirty seven metres. Also at this point the much smaller Tauwhare Falls flow under the road and drop forty five metres to the river bed below. These are visible from the bridge over the Mokau Falls.

The Motorcamp is situated in Opourau, Home Bay, nestling between the lake and the surrounding bush. It has a range of quality accommodation and facilities to suit all levels.

The bunkhouse was well suited to be the social hub. After dinner we gathered to share the day's highlights and plan the next day's activity. As well, we surprised Robbie and Mike with champagne and a card in celebration of their engagement.

On Saturday we could not believe our luck another clear day and only





ripples on the water. Despite this we had packed extra food and shelter in case of an enforced, unplanned overnight stop. Waikaremoana is known for unpredictable weather, strong gusty winds and rough waters, especially through the Narrows (Te Kauangaomanaia).

Once launched, we headed out as a group across the lake to Matuahua Point at the entrance to the Whanganui Inlet. In a sheltered bay we regrouped. Some had a quick shore stop. (Shore, yes, but not sand, just solid rock)

Stunning views of the Panekiri Bluffs, the surrounding bush covered hills and distant peninsulas sparked a discussion of the benefits of exploring the area from the water in a kayak.

A strong gusty wind was blowing down the Whanganui Inlet. As a group we spent a few minutes in the shelter of the point practising riling and bracing into the wind, watching for changes on the water surface indicating gusts and sharing tips for a safe passage across to Te Taraoamohanga Point.

More experienced kayakers buddied up with newer paddlers. Encouraged, we headed out into the rougher water. All made it across without swimming. There were happy, relieved smiles all round. For some it was their first experience of rougher waters.

From here we followed the lake's edge toward the Narrows. We found a sheltered bay that accommodated all sixteen kayaks and was not too challenging to land on. Sitting on the shore under manuka we could appreciate the scenery, soak in the sun and enjoy the company of friends. It was so peaceful.

We were lucky. The Narrows were calm, with little wind, so we paddled on beyond Te Upokohinewai Point. Our goal achieved, we turned back and toward the Whanganui Inlet. Again we regrouped, buddied up, and practised. The crossing was a little rougher, but once more everyone



crossed without difficulty. From here, we took the direct route crossing the lake back to the Motorcamp. In total we had paddled twenty six kilometres. That distance was a first for some.

It was a much quieter evening. Everyone was happy with their achievements. The plans for the following day were discussed. Instead of paddling, we chose to walk to Lake Waikareiti, as the weather conditions were thought to be deteriorating.

Lake Waikareiti was formed by a massive landslide about eighteen thousand years ago. A ten kilometre wide slab slid off high ridges in the northwest. The lake contains an island (Rahui) which in turn has a lakelet (Tamaiti). The lake is pollution free, with amazing water clarity.

The track starts near the Aniwaniwa Visitors centre and is well graded. Rising about three hundred metres it takes about an hour one way (longer for some of us). This forest is mostly red and silver beech with massive rimu towering through the canopy. There is a day shelter at the Lake. Row boats may be hired from the Visitor Centre if you wish to explore the lake further.

We enjoyed lunch at the lake's edge then headed back down. On our return some made a short detour to view the Aniwaniwa Falls (translated as rainbow). These falls, steeped in Maori legend, are a collection of



three waterfalls.

Back at Motorcamp we shared highlights of the weekend. We had been lucky to have had such good weather. Visiting Lake Waikaremoana and the Te Urewera National Park is worth the time and effort spent in planning and getting there. The unsealed road ensures that the area isn't over populated.

Our farewells said: we left this magnificent lake with its dramatic bluffs, clear waters and beautiful native bush.



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