

All Blacks Victory

by Patricia Gleason

And a great weekend paddling



Just like the lead up to the Rugby World Cup, the build up to the joint Hamilton/Wellington club trip to Hahei was much touted and, I must admit, well worth it.

After hearing so many great reviews of last year's Hahei paddle trip, I signed up months in advance and was keen to explore the meandering coves and caves of the Coromandel from the water. Being from 'abroad', I am still experiencing much of New Zealand for the first time – and this was to be my first visit to this part of the Coromandel. I yearned for a long Labour weekend of sun, unseasonably warm, glorious weather, and calm seas...not to mention an All Blacks victory! What could be a better weekend than getting out in my kayak, meeting new folks from both the Hamilton and Wellington clubs, and cheering on the ABs?

What is the saying about the best laid plans? With all my gear and kayak ready days in advance for this much anticipated trip, I should have guessed I wasn't going to get quite what I dreamt of when I had to stop and refasten my kayak twice en route to Hahei due to the strong winds pushing it AND my car around on the road. During the second stop, I realised the tow flag had been ripped from the back of the kayak...though the rope tying it on remained...so I improvised with a rather small hanging reflector meant for my bicycle (thank you Kathmandu sale). At least I got my tent set up and everything ready just as it got dark and the crowd went off to watch the dubious Wales vs. Australia match.

Saturday morning provided the blue skies and sun I wanted...along with the same blustery winds from Friday which were to delay the start time. At least I was away, it was sunny and warm, and I could kick back and relax. And then word came down the row from the Wellington crew that we were under a tsunami warning. I thought, "what?" They must be taking the mickey out of us.

Alas, there had been a 7.3 magnitude earthquake off the Kermadec



This picture and two to the right: Caves and overhangs of all sizes needed to be explored.



Islands and all of New Zealand was under a tsunami warning. Fortunately, once the gauges at Raol Island registered such small fluctuations, the warning was cancelled and now all we were waiting on again was the wind to die down. Apparently the Friday paddle had been "exciting" with the wind, and a new kayak was appropriately christened by turning upside down, much to its paddlers' dismay. The trip leaders did not want to have an even larger group on the water in those conditions.

Finally, we hit the water

Broken up into pods, we set off to explore the coast south to Hot Water Beach. The caves were awesome, and even with the weather fluctuating overcast to sunny and back again, the colours in the rocks were vibrant and inspiring. The highlight for me was all nine of my pod gathering in the roofless cave, looking up at the overhanging trees and discussing how high we might rise if a tsunami were actually to hit. Visions of clinging to the branches above with kayaks falling down amused us as we pattered about. And much pattering we did, in



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Somewhere in the South Pacific (Hahei)



order to see and explore all the coves had to offer. So imagine my surprise when I discovered, that I, as a "confident beginner" paddler, was in the fast pod! My confidence shot up, which was good...and bad... as I decided to sneak through some rocks just as a wave was coming and my paddling and steering were out of synch to the rising water and SNAP went my rudder cable. Surely a paddler good enough for the fast pod doesn't need a rudder?

The trip down to Hot Water Beach took close to 3 hours and our legs were ready for a break! Once all the pods arrived, some wetter than others, it was a sight to see 30 or so



It wasn't all hard work.

Under the ever- watchful eyes.



the pods together safely, communicated well among the pods, and things were running smoothly. But there was a kayak group leader further down the beach, blanket spread, making fresh cappuccinos and doling out delicious looking home-baked biscuits for his group members! When asked, my pod leader assured me that on the next trip, if I paid him what those tourists paid their leader, he too would ensure I had a fresh coffee at our stop point. Hmm...maybe I'll stick with water enroute.



With the groups slowly dwindling and our pod losing numbers with each day (I really didn't think he was THAT bad a pod leader ;-), the hard cores ventured forth on Monday morning to explore two of the islands just off Hahei beach. There were sea urchins, better known here as kina, as far as the eye could discern below water on the leeward side of Mahurangi Island, the big island closest to Hahei beach. More caves on the windward side brought back memories of amusement park rides, with my kayak sneaking around dark corners in one cave before I decided I wasn't brave enough to explore any further and made a beeline full steam in reverse for the exit. Another cave had a back exit to the cave next door, so we amused ourselves going in one side and out the other. Further along, with the entire groups meeting



up in the shallows between Motueka and Poikeke Islands, we enjoyed seeing small stingrays, and a giant grouper the size of a paddle fin. From my peers I learned ingenious techniques for pit stops, when out on a long paddle with no place to stop. With the best weather of the weekend, it was truly a glorious day to be out on the water.

Team building

Time off the water was definitely well spent, and enjoyed by all. Saturday night saw all of us enjoy a potluck dinner, with enough food to feed the entire campground! Good times and definitely too much wine were had by most...certainly by this happy paddler. Waking to the chorus of tuis prancing about in the pohutukawa trees overhead brought life and light to the dimness Saturday's wine had cast upon me.

Sunday's mid-afternoon return from paddling was likely not a good thing for some, as there were hours to wait to the big match. In good club fashion, a spot was chosen and all gathered round, pulling out all the leftover snacks and munchies that could be found. Bevvies were shared and enjoyed. Some, who it may be argued were the smarter ones, ventured forth for walks along the beach or down to Cathedral Cove. In the end, we made it to match time – some just barely – and packed the TV room of the campground to cheer on the All Blacks. While not the performance many of us were hoping for or expecting, victory was ours in the end!

The best summary of the weekend was a similar message shared by multiple paddlers from both Wellington and Hamilton. "There isn't anyone here I don't want to know." That has been my limited experience with all the Yakity Yak trips I've been on so far, and I thank all involved in both the Hamilton and Wellington clubs, particularly Tony and Neil, for organising a fantastic weekend. Until next time...

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