

Our Most Excellent Kayaking Adventure

By K.Sven Hjelmstrom

“How about spending a week touring golden sand beaches, watching baby seals swim around your kayak and relaxing with good company in the evening ? Join us for Easter week, 2010 at Abel Tasman National Park.”

This invitation caught my eye on the Hamilton Canoe & Kayak web site. It sounded like a good follow up to my most enjoyable trip down the Whanganui River with Pete Townend and 50 plus other Yakity Yakkers a few years back.

Yes, Canoe & Kayak Hamilton was joining forces with the windy Wellington C & K crew to travel to Marahau in the South Island for OUR MOST EXCELLENT KAYAKING ADVENTURE.

Auckland and Hamilton met the Wellington crew at their Canoe & Kayak Centre where our trip leader, the smiling Andy Blake, was securing kayaks on the trailer.

The ferry trip was fine and our own personal life boats on the vehicle made it secure! After a long, long day for the Hamilton crew, we enjoyed a restful night at a motor camp in Picton.

Thursday 1st April, 2010. The Paddling Starts

16 paddlers travelled in three vehicles from Nelson to Motueka to pick up fresh rations before hitting the water at Marahau. The Wellington crew suddenly gave the famous one finger salute when a yellow Barracuda Beachcomer (belonging to Dr Nikki) lost its front tie down and reached for the sky. Our walkie talkies alerted Andy and the convoy stopped to secure the kayak. A big 10/4 and “roger that” soon became catch phrases along with good natured “rogering” comments.

At Marahau we packed our Kayaks, had the obligatory briefing, were told to “lock and load” by Andy and on an ebbing tide we paddled to our first camp site at Apple Tree Bay. Abel Tasman National Park’s crystal clear blue waters, bush overflowing down steep hills to the rocky shore line, which just begged to be rock gardened, were beautiful and majestic. “Roger that eh Harvey!”

It was only a few clicks to Apple Tree Bay’s golden sand beach where we pitched tents just a few metres from the sea. Some had a quick swim. Aahhh!! A kayak, a tent, great weather, great food, great company, heaven at last!



The team practise their routine for the new Olympic sport of Synchronised Kayak Dancing.

Friday 2nd of April

We were on the water by 9:30 am and at Adele Island we saw our first seal and a small group of baby seals. Just picture a beautiful blue sky, next to no wind, calm sea, most excellent company and you have some notion that we were now in kayaking heaven. The only distraction was from distant water taxis taking passengers to camp sites, kayaks stacked aft. We paddled at a steady pace to match our kayaking skills. No hassles and no stress rock gardening in beautiful scenery. We landed at Pukatea Bay for lunch, a rest and the Easter Egg Hunt. Andy Blake's boundless energy, paddling and cooking skills were greatly impressing the group. He was most ably assisted by Tony Barrett.

The next camp site was at Bark Bay. During the afternoon we hugged the coast, explored and rock gardened. Andy and other more experienced kayakers completed a few rolls.

Bark Bay proved to be a boomer of a camp site. It had water that could be drunk without boiling and yes folks, flush toilets. We even had a kitchen and a fire that proved to be a focus for dining. The group of 16 now really became as 'one' when we let our hair down and threw caution and inhibition to the wind. Nikki and Catherine (Wellies) burst into song as ABBA chicks. Yours truly and Harvey (Hamilton) regretted that we hadn't brought guitars to accompany the talent.

Most were in bed by 10:00 pm. Another day in paradise had come to



an end.

Hey you Auckland Clubbies, it might be a long way to go (900 km one way) but you have just got to do this trip...

Saturday 3rd of April was another day in heaven. We locked and loaded and headed for Tonga Island, famously known as a seal

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Who will blink first? By Easter the baby seals in the colony are very independent and extremely entertaining.

breeding colony. There were seals everywhere. Naturally we kept a respectful distance until we found an empty pool waiting to be explored. Quickly baby seals left their mothers and came to explore us. Within a few minutes, streams of bubbles rose to the surface as the babies glided beside and under the kayaks. Soon they were climbing on to kayaks to investigate humans. One baby seal waddled up the front deck of Michelle's kayak, took the bailing sponge, dived over one side and popped up the other. The Penguin paddler retrieved her intact sponge.

The mothers first watched, then ignored us, while their babies played.

More than fifty dolphins then appeared and were seen at close range by some of us.

We reluctantly left this truly beautiful scene and headed for Shag Harbour where nesting and resting Shags were everywhere. Shagadelic!! On the flood tide we paddled into a stunning inlet and met more baby seals who were playing in the warm shallow water. There were penguins and jellyfish and the scenery was drop dead gorgeous.

Wow, what a day!

Our next night was at Onetahuti Beach's fabulous camp site. It too had fresh water and flush toilets. We were tired, relaxed but very happy after another brilliant day on the water. A couple of light showers during the night helped to cool us down.

Sunday 4th April the weather report indicated that a SE

swell was building. We returned to Tonga Island where the low tide put the fabulous seal nursery out of reach but we had fun rock gardening in the swell. Our next landing was at Mosquito Bay on another stunning sandy beach with a beautiful outlook towards the sea. The flood tide rose quickly over the shallow beach and while we had a drink and a bite to eat, we repeatedly pulled our kayaks to safety!

Andy provided the floppy Frisbee that he found on the roadside many moons ago. What a weapon! It flies so well yet is so soft to catch and so forgiving – just like its owner, pancake Chef Andy.

Back in kayaks we left the comfort of mother sea and paddled up the Falls River to see the swing bridge and the crossing that trampers use on their overland route. Give me the sea kayaking option any day!

Bill and Phil (the flower pot men from Hamilton) wandered over rocks towards a waterfall. Oops! Here is a tip for kayakers – remember to tie up your kayak where water levels can change. They were lucky this time but let's face it, they had a big back up crew!

Salt of the earth Jim Walker left his kayak, clambered up a steep incline and took a group photograph from the swing bridge. He will soon be paddling around Stewart Island with Andy Blake. With Jim back in his kayak we returned to the rivers' calm, hot estuary for lunch and an attempt at kayak gymnastics. Just over the sand dune behind us the SE swell was building and the wind was a steady 10-15 knots. Andy, Harvey, Jim and Tony enjoyed rolling practice before we headed for the next camp site at Anchorage.

En route we paddled up the Torrent River on an outgoing tide and



Cleopatra's Pool is well worth the walk.

beached on slippery rocks with not a lot of room for our kayaks. We wanted to see Cleopatra's Pool. A group of kayakers who had shared a camp site with us warned that our 500 metre stroll and visit to the pool meant we could be walking our kayaks back over the rocks. We managed to get back to the sea with just a short portage over slippery rocks. All good fun eh what!

Whoah! Anchorage was like heading back to civilization. Bodies and kayaks everywhere!

While at most camp sites it was a group effort with no moans or complaints to haul the kayaks off the beach, at Anchorage, there were special racks for kayaks.

As we did most nights everyone was involved with cooking and over dinner time we shared the day's experiences and learnt what other people eat and cleverly cook for an evening meal. But at Anchorage we were a crowd!

Andy Blake our trip leader was the master chef. He made pikelets or pancakes and all manner of fancy dishes. He carried so few provisions on the trip yet he made the most amazing, scrumptious dishes. We have asked Andy to put some suggestions in the New Zealand Kayak Magazine. It would be good to see a 'cook off' between Andy and our other master chef, Pete Townend.

Monday 5th April was our last day on the water.

We listened to the forecast for the day, an easterly wind with swell to 2 metres, launched in the calm harbour and paddled out to the waiting swells. The weather was still fine but we soon had a real blast paddling south to Split Apple Rock.

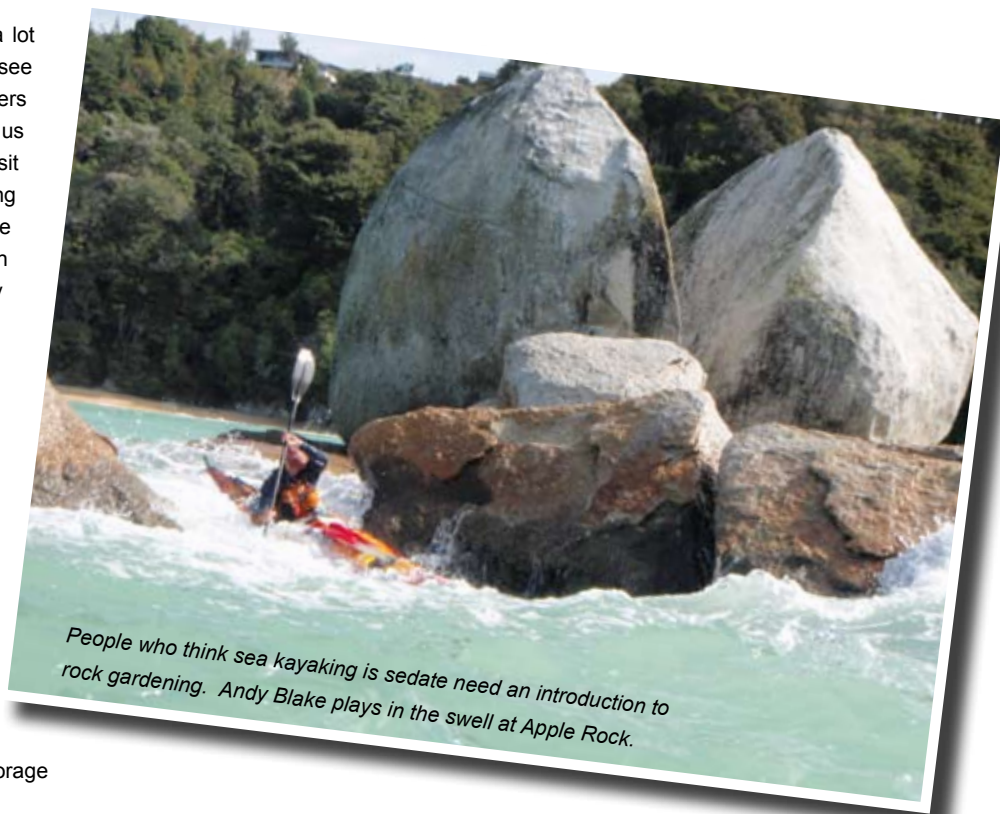
Jim, Rachel & Sarah posed for an action shot with Jim standing in his kayak in the middle of 3 rafted kayaks after the precursor poo position warm up. Our fearless leader Andy, who was close by, mastered the swells to take the close up action shot. Result – an extreme close up due to the wave action. (Don't try this at home kids.)

After passing the headland, Te Katetu Point, the seas were calmer and we made for a rest stop at Akersten Bay. The beach landing called for an angled arrival and paddle ready for the bracing stroke if required. All landed safely. Most then needed an assisted launch. As we passed Marahau and snuck in to view Split Apple Rock the swell decreased and the wind abated.

The Rock is impressive. More experienced kayakers had real fun rock gardening in the swell and shooting the rocky gap right beside the Split Apple. Andy did what can only be described as rock garden caving. He found very narrow and rocky caves and often disappeared for minutes at a time. Others (like Harvey) followed. We watched in awe.

We returned to Marahau at high tide, landed and packed up. The more experienced kayakers continued rock gardening. As we rounded the point sheltering Split Apple Rock an unpredicted swell caught one experienced kayaker, left him high on a rocky outcrop and tipped him out of his boat. He was quickly rescued. Well done team!

We were tired, but blown away by the four days of excitement, adventure and great company in the Abel Tasman National Park. The Hamiltonians and lone Aucklander, who had submitted to Moo Loo culture, took the long journey home in their stride.



People who think sea kayaking is sedate need an introduction to rock gardening. Andy Blake plays in the swell at Apple Rock.

A big cheer for Elaine Vine (Wellington) who paddled the whole way without the need for a tow, and for many more personal bests achieved on this most exciting adventure.

Our grateful thanks must go to both Andy Blake and Tony Barrett for organising this MOST EXCELLENT KAYAKING ADVENTURE.

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