

KAYAKING KALEIDOSCOPE: KURATAU TO KINLOCH

By Phillip Donnell



Arriving at Cherry Bay

Lake Taupo (619 sq.km) is the greatest body of fresh water in Australasia, but can become as rough as many a salty ocean.

Its 180 km shoreline contains countless beaches, cliffs, nooks and crannies which take a lifetime to thoroughly explore. The western shores are isolated and not very accessible by road. Hence, few are aware of their stark and spectacular scenery. Jump in a kayak however, and you have a unique opportunity to view a littoral unlike anywhere else in New Zealand.

Our ambition was to kayak the periphery, from Kuratau in the southwestern corner of the lake to Kinloch on the northern edge. This involves 12-15 hours of paddling, excluding breaks, and traverses two fairly distinct wind zones. In the southern reaches of the lake, southerlies prevailed, but once we turned into the Western Bay 20 knot nor'westers hit us. The majority of this journey is also bordered by high cliffs, subject to katabatic wind gusts strong enough to flip a boat. All things considered, an extended spell of anticyclonic weather is essential for



Cliffs near Werohanga Point

Late lunch on a rock shelf.
Te Hapua Bay



safe and enjoyable travel. The lake water is cold but pure enough to drink, especially if taken from open waters.

Having deposited a vehicle at Kinloch, we set out from Kuratau late morning, which gave us only just enough time to get to our first overnight destination, Cherry Bay. The precipitous cliffs were unrelenting, except for occasional gaps at Te Hape and Te Hapua. South of the former, the great bluff Rangitukua hosts a kiwi sanctuary. We ate lunch on a rock platform before craning our necks beneath the vast 300 m rock walls of Karangahape. By mid-afternoon, the scenario changed from wind-assisted to wind-resisted as we greeted the gulls and shags of Motuwhara Island. For a couple of hours, we battled fierce head

winds, but the lack of landing places gave us no choice than to press on. As the sun was setting, we were relieved to reach the haven which would be our first night's respite. Cherry Bay had several campsites and a toilet. Vessels were moored cheek to jowl along the beach. We had paddled for 5.5 hours.

The next day dawned calm and cold. We were woken at an unearthly hour by boaties who failed to appreciate the acoustic qualities of amphitheatre coves. Even an ordinary conversation in that setting can irrevocably banish sleep. A 30-minute paddle took us to the scenic gem of the entire trip, Whanganui Bay. Crystal clear water, white sand, a craggy backdrop, and quaint shanties all contribute to the beauty and

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grandeur of this idyllic spot. It is also a favourite with rock climbers. After lingering for some time, we moved on to Waihaha, where camping requires a permit, the Queen's Chain does not apply, and the locals were not particularly welcoming. It is possible to divert 5 km up this river to view the impressive Tieke Falls (37m). However, time was against us, so we progressed below cliffs, on which vegetation squeezed into any suitable fissure, to Otupoto Falls, tumbling into Waihora Bay. Permission is needed to camp at its eastern end. It had been 4.5 hours of paddling since we'd left. When the fizz boats departed, we revelled in the solitude and silence. The prominent peaks of Tongariro National Park graced the glowing skyline.

An alternative camping spot for our second night could have been Boat Harbour, on the tip of Kawakawa Point, our first pause on Day three. It is only 100 m across, and provides complete shelter. Numerous campsites dot the bush at the back of the beach, and the harbour is often crowded with upwards of 30 vessels. If you want a quieter place to rest, head 200 m north to another delightful little inlet. It took us an hour to traverse the wide semi-circle of Kawakawa Bay to the excellent camping and picnic ground at the far end. A walkway from Kinloch terminates here, and a half-hour ascent to the cliff-top lookout affords panoramic vistas. The eastern cliffs are fantastic. Contorted layers of

lava at the waterline give way to fractured ignimbrite blocks, with one part remarkably reminiscent of the Outback.

A final burst around Te Kauwae Point ushered us into Whangamata Bay. Such is its indentation that the golden poplars of Kinloch looked very distant. Although we had only been paddling for 3.5 hours, it seemed much longer. Once landed, the fragrance of coffee wafting from the 'Topsy Trout' café coaxed us indoors, a suitably indulgent conclusion to a memorable expedition.



Boat Harbour, Kawakawa Point

Breakfast at Cherry Bay





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