

Lakes Tarawera and Rotomahana

More than just a kayaking trip.

By Suzanne Boslem



Certainly not as cold and wet as Scotland!

When my husband Ian and I immigrated to New Zealand from Scotland it was with the sole aim of changing our life. You don't move to the other side of the world and take your old life with you - else why bother? We gave up a lot (family, double glazing, central heating), but we hoped to gain more.

One of the first things we did when we arrived last April was to mosey into Canoe & Kayak centre in Wellington. We'd kayaked while on holiday in New Zealand in 2010 and loved it. Yes, you can kayak in Scotland but

a) its cold and rains a lot and b) its cold and rains a lot. We'd only gone in for a look and before we knew it Andy had signed us up for the skills course (he bribed us with his amazing carrot cake muffins) and within nine months our new hobby and new life is shaping up nicely. The trip to Lake Tarawera was our third outing. After battling gusts and waves on Marlborough Sounds on our first trip. I thought we'd be in for an easy ride on a lake. Yeah right! Despite offerings of beer to the Lake God (although I think it's fairer to say he stole it thanks to Bruce's poorly 'weighted cooling-in-lake'



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technique), we didn't get on the water until day three. Day one was spent travelling and shopping for chicken, and day two was too gusty. So trip leader Neil moved the days about and we stayed on dry land, tramping to the stunning Tarawera Falls instead. None of which was a hardship, but we were glad to get on the water on day three.

A decent kayak from Boatshed Bay to Te Rata Bay was a combination of strong winds and calm inlets. When we reached Hot Water Beach, it was more like the Gold Coast than a DOC campsite thanks to a father and son bonding session and groups of young people water-skiing, so it was tough to find camping spots. Still, we all got a bath in the hot water pools, once we got used to the top metre being burny hot and the bottom metre being freezing cold.

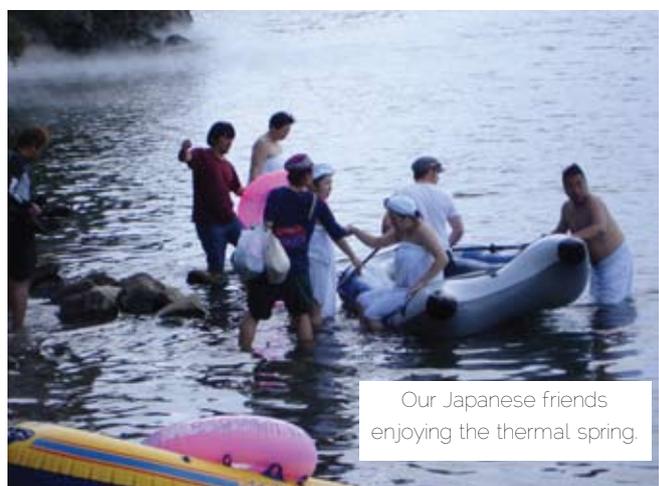
And for dinner, the Lake God offered us up a few trout. We didn't even have to catch it - our fellow campers had more than they could eat so we were happy to help out.

Ian and I hadn't been camping for four years, so it was good to get under canvas again. And thanks to the earplugs even the teenagers' midnight antics didn't keep us awake.

Day four was the major highlight, though. It was a short paddle to the portage track to Lake Rotomahana. Never has a 1.5 km trek up an easy incline been so frustrating and so funny. I was one of three to try a spot of off-road kayaking - it may be the quickest way to the water, but I wouldn't recommend it. And the tree across the track just took the biscuit.

Lake Rotomahana isn't easy to get to, but that's part of its charm, along with the abundant birdlife and geothermal activity. We had it to ourselves except for the pleasure boat that transported a few Japanese tourists around the lake - not the only encounter we'd have with the Japanese, but more of that later!

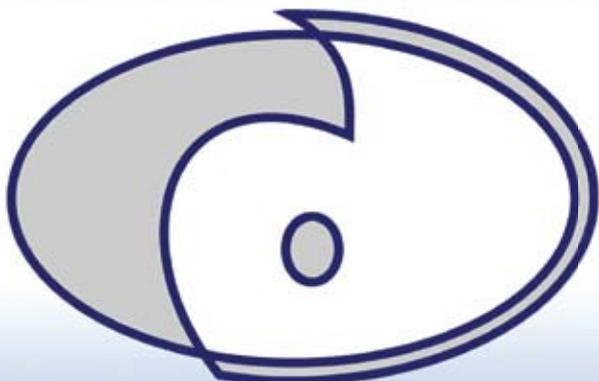
The gusty winds continued but again, punching through headwinds and choppy white-topped waves (who knew lakes had waves!) was always followed by sunny sheltered calmness. I'd like to say the portage back was easier with practice but, judging by the swearing,



Our Japanese friends enjoying the thermal spring.



Beautiful clear skies.

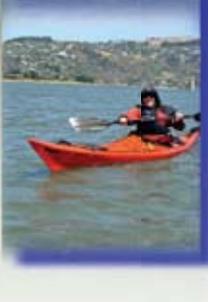


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and the UK might have a lot in common, but I've found that it's the differences that make it interesting (and itchy).

The last paddling day started easily enough. Te Rata Bay is nicely sheltered, but we could all see the chop out on the lake and there was going to be no direct route over for us. We gritted our teeth and kayaked south into the headwind until we could cross safely. Kayaking will be a key part of our new life here – all Andy and Neil have to do is persuade us to buy the kayaks. We've got the skills and the roof racks..it's only a matter of time. Although I reckon we should probably buy a house first with double glazing and central heating – Scots have gone soft!

Pictures: Left - Wheels were a great help.. most of the time.

Below - Speed was not a causal factor on this hairpin bend. Thankfully no-one was injured in the incident.

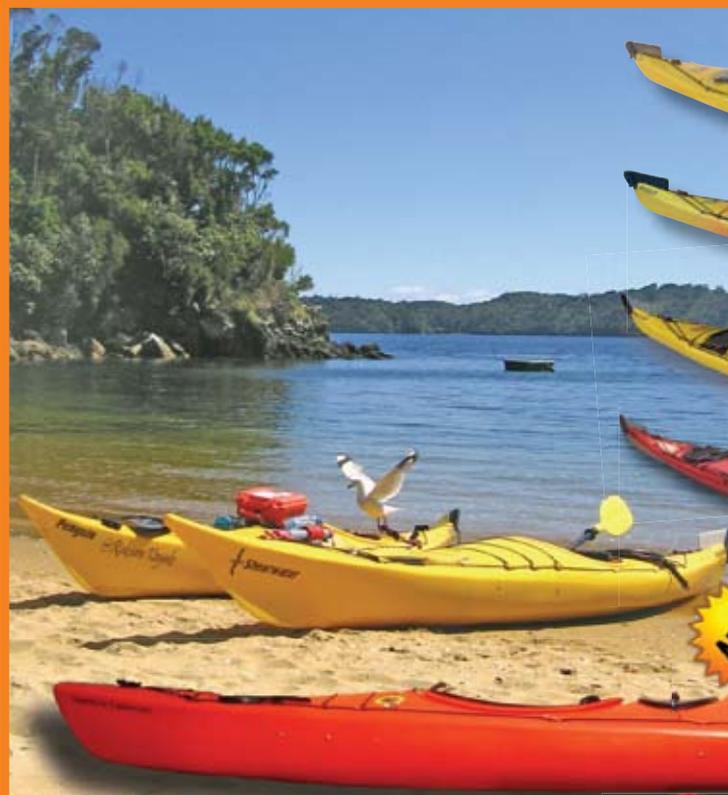
Right - They've certainly got central heating sorted in these parts.

tired people and portaging don't mix. If kayaks were meant to have wheels, they'd have a motor as well.

And now for the bizarre bit. The fathers and sons had left Hot Water Beach, but instead we were met by a group of Japanese in pyjamas who turfed us off our landing beach.

They soon clambered back onto their luxury chartered yacht, changed into towels and sailed out all of three metres in their rubber dinghy to fall into the hot water and shout loudly at each other. Turns out they were filming a TV comedy – it made us laugh, although probably more at them than with them. We spent a relaxing evening watching the sun set casting amazing colours onto Mount Tarawera. It was also my first encounter with sandflies. Scotland has midges, but having never had an insect bite in my life, I didn't think I needed insect repellent. Wrong. New Zealand





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