

Whitianga Wander

By Ali Ryan



A gathering of cars with kayaks strapped to roof racks in a motorcamp is always a sign of a great weekend ahead.

The lure of finding a pub up a creek and doing a bit of rock gardening tempted a good-sized group of us to meet up at the Harbourside Holiday Park in Whitianga on a Friday in the middle of winter. Unfortunately our intrepid leader Ruth was unable to join us due to injury, but duties were ably taken on by Renee and after much group discussion, perusal of charts, studies of swell maps and weather forecasts a plan was hatched for the following day.

We gathered at the boat ramp near the marina on Saturday morning, loaded up our boats and headed off up the estuary in search of the Coroglen Pub where a cold beer and hot pie awaited us. Greg knew where he was going, so we followed him. It was a nice paddle past the boats moored up. The hills in the distance came in and out of view as the clouds and rain showers passed by, and the mangroves stretched out towards us.

After a while we found the creek we were looking for and followed it down to a road bridge. Unfortunately it wasn't the exact creek or road bridge we were looking for. Another check of the chart and back down the creek we paddled. Returning to the estuary Renee decided to check out one clump of mangroves for the right creek, while the rest of us went the other way. Being a trip with a high leader ratio several of them decided they had figured out where to go so at points along the way one or two would peel off in search of the elusive Coroglen Pub. We knew it existed. We'd seen it on the drive here!

It remains the Holy Grail of Paddle To The Pub's. We shall return to be victorious another weekend!

Once the tide turned we decided to return to base, lunching on a beach

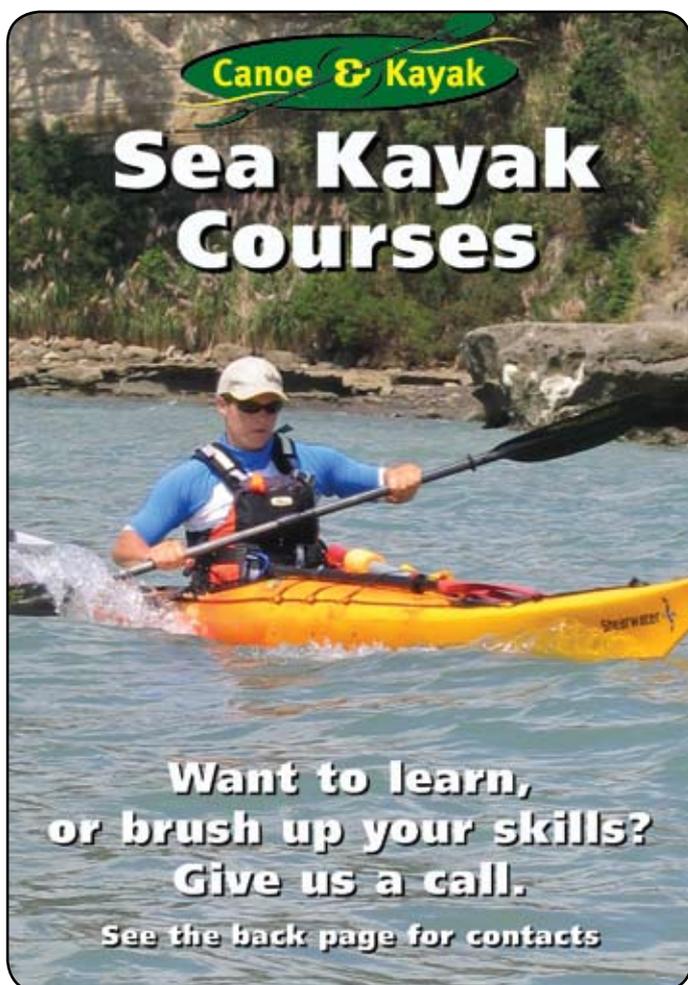
on a mangrove island. Not quite the pub grub we'd looked forward to but a meal with a view and good company none the less.

Back at the motorcamp we studied charts and GPS's to see where we'd gone wrong and blamed the mangroves for tricking us into paddling up the wrong creeks. A very convivial evening followed with an excellent dinner at Al Camino restaurant and then a visit to Smitty's Sports Bar to watch the game. For some of us, the rugby failed to inspire but the lure of a band playing at the Whitianga Hotel sounded good, so off we went to dance the night away.

Sunday dawned clear and without a breath of wind. A one-in-a-million day spread out before us, so we paddled out of the harbour and into the bay, following the cliffs and beaches around to Cathedral Cove where we stopped for lunch. Out in the bay a sea-mist slowly lifted, and for most of the trip we were the only craft on the water. Conditions were perfect for rock-gardening and exploring right inside the sea caves. We were provided with a touch of drama as the day's only swell caught Linda as she tried to slip between a couple of large rocks. With nerves of steel she backed out of the gap while the rest of us shouted encouragement and bit our nails. Unperturbed she carried on and successfully rock-gardened the rest of the day away.

Conditions being so perfect, after lunch it was decided that we should explore the offshore islands. Rock falls have closed up a cave Chris remembered but there was an arch to paddle through which provided some great photos. Paddling back to the harbour was like gliding over melted butter and we seemed to get back to the boat ramp far too quickly.

Greg redeemed himself by recommending a great cafe in Tairua for coffee and cake before we said our goodbyes and left behind a weekend of magic kayaking and awesome memories.



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