

Taupo ROCKS!

By Ruth E. Henderson







You could say that Lake Taupo is the centrepiece of the North Island...Maori legend says it is the pulsating heart of Maui's fish. With a perimeter of 193 kms and at 616 square kilometres, it's certainly hard to ignore...but for two years that is precisely what we did.

After the Rotorua Lakes, Shakey (aka John Fleming) told us you just 'have' to do Taupo...but the idea didn't catch fire... I knew I'd eventually have to circumnavigate it, just so I could 'move on' to the South Island Lakes. The purchase of the four Topo50 maps needed for the second largest freshwater lake in Oceania cranked up the motivation. Evan Pugh's list of freedom campsites left no excuses.

The plan I sold the others was an anti-clockwise trip, over seven days averaging 25 – 30 kms daily, at the end of November.

Before our departure I received a handwritten letter from Shakey "BE ASSURED...IT WILL BE GOOD, GREAT, BLOODY MARVELLOUS ✓✓✓". Despite the shouty capitals, I still didn't quite believe him. Peter, Shelley and I assembled the night before in Taupo at our friend Jude's place. Car shuttles done, we left a "Two Minute Form" with the Harbour Master and finally...we were off into a forecast 1-5 knot wind! It was hot, it was sunny, the water was crystal-clear. Magic.

Soon we were paddling past some idyllic looking Real Estate in Acacia Bay the usual departure point when day-tripping to the Maori Carvings.

Swans and mature cygnets, blue herons, Australian coots, grebes, the diving dabchicks and their antics kept us entertained and occasionally a kingfisher in a blur of blue would flash by.

We nosed in for a gawk at the carvings created in the 1970s. At 10 m high, they are impressive and you do wonder how Matahi Whakataka-Brightwell and John Randell managed the job. Abseiling? Thinking we'd left behind civilisation and tourist boats we sought Whakaipo Bay. But the scar in the hillside turned into a dusty road as car after car came down to the beginning of the W2K cycle trail. Every man and his dog was on the beach enjoying the last of the afternoon sun. Evan had indicated the road end as a place to camp...and hooray it had a loo. We climbed over the style and set up camp. That night car headlights disturbed our slumbers as locals hooned around the circular road end...and I woke to strange noises... 'Bravely' I shone my torch...and there, its heart beating as fast as my own was a hedgehog in my tent vestibule. Phew. The morning brought blowflies and a lady who informed us that camping was not allowed... hadn't we seen the signs? No, we came by water not road...

Once again hugging the coastline we came upon the photogenic Mason Rock and Whangamata Bluffs and into Kinloch, we pulled up onto the grass by the marina. Onward and out of Whangamata Bay and into Kawakawa Bay we spotted some rock climbers up on the cliffs. We could have shared the campsite at the base of Te Kauwae with the climbers and cyclists but pushed on looking for a less crowded place. All we spotted were very slim beaches, so on we continued to Boat Harbour. What a silly idea



on a Saturday night at the beginning of summer! 'The boys' in their boats were having a boozy fishing weekend. We back-paddled fast, retreating to the sandy beach we'd passed minutes before. In the bush we found three wee tent sites. We have now named this place "Forget-me-not Bay". Not because it was so memorable with tiny dabchicks and grebes visible diving in the crystal-clear water, but because of the carpet of flowers we laid upon.

In that night's 'despatch' to our check-in people I did say we were 'just before' Boat Harbour, but unfortunately when Robbie Banks sent a text saying she'd meet us the next day and asked "where are you" I said Boat Harbour.

Unbeknown to me, she was actually already at Kinloch and thought she'd surprise us. We slept while she searched the harbour campsite and paddled on in the dark...

It was a day of cliff faces and waterfalls. At Waihora Bay we walked up to the Kotukutuku Stream and stumbled on a good place to camp in the future. Another cycle trail ends here, so there is a toilet and a shelter. The Otupoto Falls were pumping and fair bashed the bows of our boats... then we came upon Robbie. Waihaha looked decidedly unfriendly with signs warning folk not to land ...we went beyond them, and lunched together before she went up the stream to the Tieke Falls and back to Kinloch. We continued to potter and be mesmerised by the rock formations and cliff faces.

Lake Taupo, (as is Lake Rotorua) is a caldera or collapsed crater, created by a super volcano eruption about 26,500 years ago. This eruption ejected mostly rhyolitic lava and left layered cliffs of light coloured ignimbrite rock, and looser tephra (pumice and ash). Apparently, Taupo is the most frequently active and productive rhyolite caldera in the world with the most recent eruption in 181AD, (reportedly colouring the sky in Rome and China)



Cherry Bay camp – Photo by Shelley Stuart

and the shoreline we were bobbing about on was once 34 m higher. All I know is that the rocks stacked and packed any which way - the patterns, geometric, random or crazy, the contours of colour, the buttresses, the columns, the sheer walls plunging to great depths were wonderful. What a well-kept secret...where were all the other kayakers?

At Whanganui Bay, 'the' campsite looked a bit public, so we continued onto Cherry Bay. 'Everyone' said it was a beautiful spot. It was not. Seen from the water, it looks pretty...but the stream is full of stagnant debris, the toilet inaccessible, fallen down trees reduced the beach...

However, no-one wanted to retreat, nor continue with no pull-outs for another 12 kms. Peter ended up camped in the bush, and having to bury a few smelly things. We girls found an old rubbish bin lid and Shelley used this to fill in the holes in a wee sandy knell and I thought 'she'll be right mate' as I flattened out a spot on the water's edge. I should have recalled some of Shakey's stories about wind freshening...waves crashing...and having to shift his stretcher a couple of metres. The next morning there was a tide mark around my tent, and yes, there were puddles on my tent floor ...and it was raining.



Photo by: Shelley Stuart



After rounding Te Papatu Point, looking for an alternative to Cherry Bay (for future reference) we called into the last 'bay' before the Karangahape Cliffs. Camping was feasible, if a few rocks and branches were shifted, but it was really hammock territory.

The cliffs were monstrous, massive and mysterious cloaked in mist. The forest was wet and lush: pink and white flowers clothed the kamahi, tanekaha sported fresh new tips, the sodden upturned leaves of the palmate five-finger looking like huge flowers mingled with whiteywood, whilst pyramidal rewarewa poked through the canopy. Te Hapua would be a good camp, with a toilet...but not this time, onward we went to Te Hape Bay. The reserve had a loo, but you couldn't miss the 'no camping signs' so we carried on finding a sand shelf just before Kuratau.

Quickly we set up camp...and as the sun had come out, I found alternative uses for paddles – propping up my tent so the floor dried, and likewise my mattress, sleeping bag... Kowhai trees framed the view of Motutaiko Island and cloud reflections: calmness reigned, all was well with the world.

We had a lazy start, the excuse being waiting for clothes to dry. In truth, it was just a gorgeous spot to linger in. We cruised past Kuratau, watching birds fly from the bush or shore: the lumbering then soaring wood pigeons, the swift dart of the kingfisher, the blue heron's languorous flight.

We were now at the southern end of the lake. Waihi Falls looked a good place for a walk ...but there was no pathway, so we sat in the sunshine



KAYAK COURSES

SEA KAYAKING
SIT-ON-TOP
WHITE WATER
ROLLING
MULTISPORT GRADE TWO
SURFING
AND MANY MORE



LEADING THE MARKET SINCE 1994

FOR INFO SEE:
CANOEANDKAYAK.CO.NZ/COURSES
OR
PHONE: 09 476 7066

for lunch. We dipped our hands in the hot water as steam rose around the marae, investigated the lichen and seagull covered old wharf, skirted a huge expanse of oxygen weed and raupo making NZ scaup shift in a whirr of wings, saw 100s of black swans; those we disturbed walking on water or doing aerial swimming as they attempted to take flight.

A tree of white dots burst into life: Royal spoonbill and white heron. Fabulous. Willow Reach just before the Tongariro Delta was a maze of reeds and willows; at first intriguing, but soon a bit scary as it would be easy to get lost. I felt uneasy, not helped by the thunder booming behind us. Both Andrew and Ian, our Auckland computer savvy husbands had texted us warning of a storm in the central plateau with thunder, hail and heavy rain. Hard to believe when in running shorts and rash-shirt.

We camped on Jones Island at the main mouth of the Tongariro river. Before the rain came we'd cleared gorse and broom seedlings to pitch our tents, had dinner and jumped into bed. Peter and I both had headtorches and were happy, while Shelley joked "so, that's what books are for." As an old trumper, I was a bit worried. Lake Taupo is drained by the Waikato River, and filled by the Waitahanui, Tauranga-Taupo and Tongariro Rivers... We weren't in a gorge, but... that catchment area was getting a lot of water. I got out of bed several times in the night to check the kayaks (tied to a tree) and the water level. The next morning, we were on the water early!

In contrast to the day of birds, it was a day of animals...stumbling out of the blackberry, gorse and willows of Stump Bay we saw a Texan Long-horn, then a herd of feral goats, then rabbits. Always on the lookout for toilets or rubbish bins we stopped at the end of the bay at a clubroom off Frethey Dr. The bush and cliff faces of the Motuoapa Peninsula were beautiful after the tedium of the 8 km bay. Bypassing the commercial camp and marina we sprawled out on a sports field for lunch. Reaching our planned destination of Motutere Bay far too early - the lake flat, calm and sunny, we pushed on to Halletts Bay so as to shorten our last day.

The sight and sounds of civilisation were hard to adjust to. Trucks and cars thundered and swished by. We took several attempts to find the



PROTECT THEIR PLAYGROUND FOR YEARS TO COME

Freshwater pests, including didymo and lake snow, could squeeze the life out of our country's most precious rivers and lakes. They can be spread by a single drop of water. Help protect your favourite waterway. Always CHECK, CLEAN, DRY any equipment that comes into contact with the water, between every waterway, every time.

CHECK **CLEAN** **DRY**
 MPI.GOV.T.NZ/CHECK-CLEAN-DRY

Ministry for Primary Industries
 Manatū Ahu Matua



December 2017



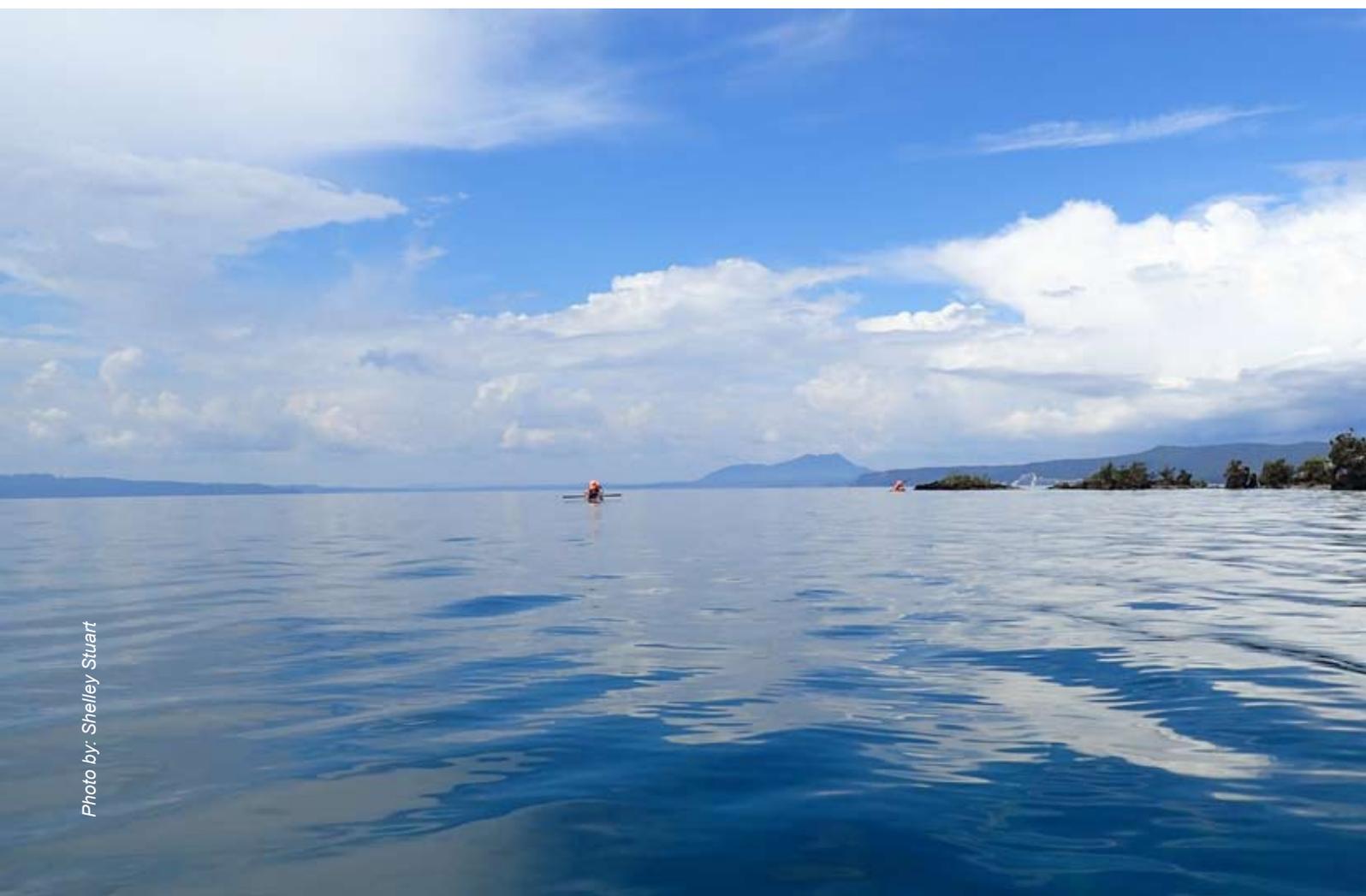


Photo by: Shelley Stuart

recommended spot (with a loo) ...note when heading north it is after the Lombardy poplars and before the point, next to a big beech trees. This provided some shelter from the developing rain while we cooked our dinner. In the morning, happy to leave our noisy campsite behind, we spotted a quieter one, just after the Hinemaiaia River, before the White Cliffs. Next time...

We'd seen the famous White Cliffs from across the lake and as approaching...the lake was a mirror which enhanced the view...but after the massive towering multi-faceted cliffs of the nor-western side of the lake...not so impressive. What was amazing was spotting a lone fisherman walking and casting, miles from any road access. Near Lake Rotongaio we stopped for a 'last chance' to gather pumice. Shelley for turning into necklaces and Peter for carving into garden ornaments. Then five-mile bay, four-mile...and finally Taupo town. Thirty seconds after landing, the threatening black skies dumped on us... Jude came to the rescue and soon we were clean, dry, wining, dining... raving about Taupo. The next day stopping off at Rotorua to see 88 year old Shakey, we asked "Where next?" he told us, the South Island, Lake Manapouri.

When I got home, my kayaking neighbour Gavin asked... "In ten words, how was Taupo?" I replied " Exceeded expectations. Worth repeating. Especially Northern Western side. **Taupo ROCKS!**



