

Chesapeake Paddler



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Paddling New Zealand's Marlborough Sounds

By Chip Walsh



Queen Charlotte Sound. Photo by Chip Walsh

[Editor's Note: Paddling away from home is always an adventure. This issue has a report on paddling away from home that came my way earlier this year.]

There was a ton of stuff to do before catching the BlueBridge Line's Ferry from Wellington NZ to Picton. Check in was 12:15 for a 1:15 sailing. I started off on foot to get stove fuel, maps, pump up the wheels of the dolly, and pick up last minute vittles. I found the people of Wellington delightful; everyone was very helpful. Back at the hotel by 10, I fit all the gear into drybags and a large duffel. The concierge paged a cab for me, and I poured

all the gear into the cab for the short ride to Queens Wharf. My cab driver deposited me and my small hill of gear at the pier. I rented a rotomolded "Shear Water" sea kayak from Fergs. "Do the hatches leak?" I asked. "Oh, no, they're not supposed to," she replied. I opened the rear hatch, and the compartment was about half full of water. "Oh my, I don't know how that got in there."

It was just about noon by the time the last of my gear disappeared into the kayak and I got the boat up on the dolly, ready to roll. I went up onto the observation deck to enjoy the sunny, but windy weather, with my gortex rain suit in a handbag, and found a seat in the sun. Out in Cook Strait, the wind could knock you off your feet when it caught you right. The deck was crowded leaving Wellington, but the wind and spray cleared the deck and kept the Bluebridge cruising along with a steady list.

The crew informed us that we would not be taking the shortest route, through the Tory Channel, to Picton, because one of the aqua-culture, salmon farms had broken loose in the Channel. Without the Tory Channel short-cut, the Ferry had to enter at the top of Queen Charlotte Sound, and we got to see the entire Sound, passing by Ship Cove, where the English explorer James Cook had berthed his ship on five occasions, sometimes for a month at a time. After seeing how the elements had affected our crossing of the Strait in a very large ship, I can imagine Cook must have had a sense of thankfulness for the refuge of Ship's Cove.

In the small harborside town of Picton, I rolled my kayak off the ship and over to the Visitor Information Center. At the VIC, I bought a 2-night camping permit and correlated my map to the location of the DOC campsites. At the Subway (very popular in NZ) across the street I got a 12-inch sub and an energy sports drink and proceeded to the town beach in the center of town. Ate half the sub, stowed the rest, between 5 and 6pm, I launched. Surveying the Sound from the Ferry, I had become cautiously optimistic that conditions were improving as we came to the end of the sound. Sitting up in a large ship, it had been difficult to judge just how rough it was, but I decided to head out there and see. I figured I should be able to cross the sound in under two hours, so I'd have time to spare before dark, and I had marking lights if I needed them, and an alternative camp identified that was downwind, in case I had no choice but to head in that direction.



The Bluebridge took me to Picton. Photo by Chip Walsh.

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Pye-weed growing out on the limb made for an interesting photo. We paddled leisurely for good mile plus up McIntosh Run, totally without man made noise. Rick Harwell, the prize owner of Vince's brilliant Green Kevlar Squamish, seemed to be thrilled to be going up stream vice fighting traffic in the metro area. Rick drove over from Alexandria; however, he originally lived only 5 miles from Leonardtown. He offered quite a perspective on how St. Mary's County has changed in the last 15 years.

Putting in during low tide, the lower water level separated "Glass" from "Tupperware" in the northern web of McIntosh Run. Mike Adams, a new CPA member, officially christened his brand new yellow on yellow Squamish when he settled the bottom against a sand bar, grimacing in pain. He was reassured after an immediate hull inspection revealed only a blemish.

Our return down stream was a repeat of the wildlife seen going up stream. We could see the tide slowly coming in, 2 hours late in my book. Used to the standard crabs pots, we came upon some 30 floats that appeared to be bright orange volleyballs, spaced in two perfectly straight lines, covering a ¼ mile. The inner competitors in Todd, Kristina and Margie were tempted to slalom these floats. Fearful of their wake, the group continued back to the launch at a more leisurely pace. Todd's GPS informed us that we covered 5.3 Statute miles. Everyone enjoyed the experience, continuing it at one of the local diners located a few blocks away that also hosts a restroom. Rick came ashore, but relaunched to paddle to the Abells Wharf launch, located about a mile away.

Mike and I sat on the large log under the shaded trees eating our lunch, visited by a red bellied woodpecker in a nearby tree- Overall, a successful and most enjoyable trip made possible only by the participants. The general consensus calls for the CPA to offer additional day trips.

Mark Woodside

(Continued from page 1) **New Zealand's Marlborough Sounds**

Paddling across Queen Charlotte Sound went smoothly. There were whitecaps out in the sound, but just barely. The Shear Water was very stable and I used the huge rudder...maybe twice the surface area of what I normally see...on the way across. I was headed pretty much due west and the 18 mph wind was from the Northwest. While it wasn't helping me, it wasn't hurting me that much, I was quartering the waves at an angle that lengthened the troughs and I wasn't getting a lot of splash or hull-slap. Meanwhile, the scenery was stunning. I thought I'd be in a lee once I got into Torea Bay, a body of water that cul d' sacs in a pocket of the hills of the Queen Charlotte Peninsula. Amazingly, the further I got into the bay, the harder the wind came. It baffled me. What was making this wind blow off the mountains like that? Maybe it was coming over the saddle, the low notch in the hill at the back of Torea Bay, which was my next destination.

Torea Bay was longer than I thought. About 8pm, I located the landing near the sealed track (road) to the village of Portage on Kenepuru Sound. I estimated that the QC Peninsula is only a kilometer wide at this point. For some reason, I had my mind fixed on Kenepuru Sound. It's pretty smack dab in the middle of the Marlborough Sounds Region. To paddle there would have taken several days, time I didn't have. I had a cart, so I planned to pull across the track. My map showed the saddle elevation as 104 meters, a huge gradient over a kilometer. By necessity, the road switch backed its way up the grade so I ended up walking a lot more than a kilometer. I rigged a harness around my hips and pulled like a donkey, towing 150 pounds of kayak and gear step, by step, by....



Towing the kayak over the Saddle Road. Photo by Chip Walsh.

It was fully dark by the time I reached Portage, and I had to go into a luxury hotel to ask directions to the campground. I didn't care for this camp ground, which was more of an RV parking area than a camp, but I wasn't there long. I pitched my tent beside (and by the glow of) the guest host's RV, ate the second half of my Subway sub from Picton, and lost no time getting in the sack.

Like on the Whanganui, I was awakened before dawn by the sound of rain. And again, it dried up in the daylight. I ate, packed, and launched into a humid morning when, for a change, no wind was blowing. I had only a vague idea of where to find the campsites and was very pleased to find the Ferndale Campsite near a point on the northern side of the center of Kenepuru Sound. It had a table, privy, and a water spigot, a nice feature even though the sign said not to drink it without treating it. The site where I ended up pitching my tent shrunk considerably as the tide came up right under the table.

A small group of kayakers arrived for lunch. They went past me and landed a 100 meters down the beach in the other direction, revealing the presence of another site. They had lunch and departed. Upon my return to camp (after a few failed kayak rolls) I was shocked by the huge increase in the size of the beach. The tide had receded in elevation by about ten feet.

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(Continued from page 5) **New Zealand's Marlborough Sounds**

I took some pictures as the sun set over the mountains across the sound. The stars were spectacular as I drained the scotch out of the plastic flask (to reduce weight, you know?). Then it was early to bed, and I set an alarm to wake me up before dawn...can't always count on the rain to wake me up.

I awoke next day, cooked and packed the camp into the kayak in the dark, and I was on the water at first light. The air was still for a change, and I had an easy paddle back to Portage. I rigged the PFD around my waist like a cattle yoke and towed the kayak up over the Saddle. It seemed shorter and easier, maybe because I knew the boat had to be lighter without the food and water I'd consumed. Where the Queen Charlotte Track crosses the Saddle Road there is a little monument to NZ soldiers of WWI.

I relaunched the kayak into Torea Bay and felt the wind beginning to pick up as I got onto Queen Charlotte Sound. The crossing was uneventful, amid mild whitecaps. I hugged the eastern shore as I paddled in Picton Bay, skirting close by the rocky shoreline, admiring the bottom formations in water with visibility to about ten feet. The tide completely covered the beach where I had launched on two days before, and I paddled right up to the seawall that lined the submerged beach. Conveniently, there was a wheel chair ramp where I was able to beach the kayak and get it up onto the cart for the haul over to the InterIslander Terminal.



Camp at Ferndale. Photo by Chip Walsh.

I was booked on the 1:15pm, InterIslander ferry back to Wellington. I must say I enjoyed the nonconformity of walking through the terminal with a kayak in tow, and then getting in line with the cars, 18-wheelers, and RVs and walking the kayak up the ramp onto the Ferry. In a display of Kiwi humor, when asked where to leave the kayak one of the InterIslander staff pointed to the stairwell and told me to take it up to the 7th deck. She had me going for a second.



The Shear Water kayak at rest on the beach at Ferndale camp site. Photo by Chip Walsh.

The downside of returning to Wellington on the InterIslander line, is that their docks and terminal are in an industrial area east of downtown, and I had to haul that kayak three or four kilometers back to Queens Wharf to return it to Fergs. Even walking, the wind was fierce along the harbor front, but I made it back to Fergs before they closed and returned the kayak.

Read about Chip's ferry adventure and canoeing the Whanganui River on the CPA Forum under Trip Reports <http://www.cpakayaker.com/forums/viewtopic.php?t=1659>



Terrapin Nature Area Cleanup photo by Saki

International Coastal Cleanup—Several CPA members participated in cleanup events. On September 16, 2006, Saki (Alan Sakakihara) and Dan Hoke participated in a joint effort between the Howard County Sierra Club and the Columbia Ski Club. Also participating were members of the Chesapeake Paddlers Association (CPA) and the Maryland Outdoor Club. This event was led by Sue Muller, a Natural Resource Technician with the Howard County Recreation and Parks. The mission was to pick up trash at the [Terrapin Nature Area](#), a scenic area containing one mile of shoreline. This area is on the west side of Kent Island, just north of the Bay Bridge, bordering the Chesapeake Bay. While any day is a good day to clean up the environment, this day marked International Coastal Cleanup Day. More at Saki's website <http://saki.iwarp.com/kayaking.html>