

Port Pegasus Sojourn

A lot of people go overseas for a winter holiday, so we did too. You mean they go north? You mean going south is, well, odd? So we loaded the van and headed south on Saturday while the rest of the group (10 divers and a paddler) followed on the Sunday with text messages giving us their progress and us on Sunday somewhere around about the Toko River Mouth, or Kaitangata – we were heading for Bluff weren't we? A quick stop at the Invercargill museum to check on my relative's octant, just in case we needed some navigational instruments and on to Bluff by the designated hour of 4.30 p.m.

Next morning found us at the ferry terminal unloading vans and the ferry, *Aurora*, craning up aluminium boxes on to the wharf for us to fill, boxes about 1.5 metre by 1 by 1.5 high. A couple would do for all the personal gear and the other half dozen for the beer and a few cans of fuel(?). This was followed by 4 small power boats and 3 kayaks.

Of the weather we could have picked for the crossing of Foveaux Strait, this was about as good as it gets, nor'westers on the previous days had flattened the westerly swells. It took about an hour to cross the strait and a couple more to get us down to Port Pegasus and the camp opposite Anchorage Island, our base for the next 9 days.

The gear was ferried to the beach by the power boats and those in the know dashed off into the bush to claim the best camp sites. The one we first picked we were warned against using as it was prone to flooding so we found another far better one and only half the distance up the hill from the beach and on a nice little headland. By the time all was set-up, new toilet dug, sand on the tracks, mountain radio aerial up, gear unpacked in the hut and a few other jobs, the day was done.

Tuesday was bright and sunny and as we paddled off the beach, more like Abel Tasman National Park than the deepest, darkest ends of the Roaring Forties. I suggested paddling round Anchorage Island but some how we forgot to and spent the day travelling a distance that could be done in a couple of hours. Every rock, tunnel, cave, reef and fish had to be investigated and with water clear down to 15 metres, there was a lot to see. Down Pegasus Passage, Blind Passage, caves on Noble Island, quick look at Islet Cove and back to base.

At this point I should be honest and admit we had a hut for shelter and cooking in and even more luxurious, a cook. We also had fish – fish for breakfast, fish for lunch, fish for dinner, crayfish, paua, blue cod, greenbone (butterfish), moki (smoked, yes we had one with us), tarakihi.

Dan, the organiser of the trip, had said if it was possible, go south, go that way as westerlies were the prevailing wind and would come up the arm. So our second day of paddling saw us heading south down channel and into Islet Cove. We explored all the little bays on the western side before heading across the bay to have lunch on a small beach beside the beach where another hut is sited. One of the run-about came by as we were finishing lunch and we followed them a few minutes later up Cook Arm. The tide

was running in fast and the wind blowing out, largely balancing their effects. About a couple of kilometres up the Arm, and where we fell off the chart we were using, we turned in shoaling water and headed back out. There is a long arm to the north-east, which nearly makes the piece of land our hut was on an island, but we ignored it, heading down a smaller arm to the southwest. From there we headed home to catch an entrée of just prepared shellfish.

There were strong winds for the next few days, some drizzle, alternating with cloudless skies. This bright blue would be replaced by low grey clouds within 10 minutes.

The next good day for paddling had a forecast of gusty nor'westers. We headed north for Albion Inlet. Keeping to the north shore, we paddled up the river as far as possible until we ran into a low rapid and fallen trees. Bouncing off rocks and hazards, we made our way out again, tuis and kingfishers flitting overhead. The mouth of the river is shallow as we crossed to the south side on the west side of the island, then to a sandy beach for lunch.

There are four possible camp sites in the next 3 bays, an unnamed bay, a couple in Bens Bay and one in Bulling Bay, including a piped water supply out to a mooring not far from the beach. Not really practical though for a camper to have to paddle out to fill a billy for tea. All these bays were intimately explored before we headed home past Red Beach, where it might also be possible to camp on top of the yellow bank at the back of the beach.

The next day we headed out to find Smugglers Cove with vague directions as to its position, somewhere along the north shore of Albion Inlet. Smugglers Cove has a very narrow entrance and a "hole" with a beach at the back. Scanning the shore showed a lot of coast that wouldn't support such a topography and we ended up on the north west coast, finding the entrance reasonably easily once we were close enough to it. About 70 metres south from the north west corner of Albion Inlet. The entrance is less than 2 metres wide, probably the same depth of water and with 3-4 metre high walls. The cove inside is about 15 metres by 15 with a beach at the back and bush all round. We'd just paddled out when one of the run-abouts came by with a couple of divers. I thought he'd go into the cove after saying "Hello." but he didn't as we found out later he didn't realise that was where the cove was.

We carried on south east along the coast until it turned north east. We followed this until a sand beach appeared in Twilight Bay. I thought there'd be a better bay round the corner but fortunately we didn't go to find it as there wasn't one. Message, if you have found a beach, use it, there probably isn't another one for miles. Here we stayed for lunch with a watery sun shining down. Our run up the coast to Belltopper Falls, past the ruined wharf and remains of a steam engine were in sun as the clouds were finally blown away. Belltopper Falls were so named because someone had had his belltopper, top hat, blown off when visiting the falls. We didn't realise at the time but the site of the hotel was not far away on the north east shore.

It was time to head home and we ferry glided across Albion Inlet against a 25 knot breeze then ran down the coast, only stopping to take pictures of Red Beach. Back to a dinner of fish again, a clear starry night and no wind.

Our final day of paddling was again with a report of gusty nor'westers. We headed south west directly for Kelp Point and from there spent the day rock hopping. In a bay just before the point leading into Evening Cove, there is a perfect camping area, looking large enough to take a reasonably large group of kayakers. Evening Cove is a convoluted series of little bays and islands and we finally exited it in time for a late morning tea on a low sloping rock point, covered with white lichen. The two oyster catchers ignored us and carried on doing what oyster catchers do on a rocky islet. A short run along the northern coast of Shipbuilders Cove and another stop, this time for lunch on one of two useable beaches.

Though this is called Shipbuilders Cove, the ship building was actually done in a bay in South Arm, further to the south. Here the first ship on Stewart Island was built.

The next point had the longest cave we'd so far found, at least 7 kayaks long and still going. Not easy to see where we were and the only thing to do was to take a photo and find out where we'd got to later. We finally got to the south west corner of Shipbuilders Cove and managed to get a little way up the creek at the foot of Bald Cone.

Time to head home, mainly with a tail wind, until it died on us. In Pegasus Passage we spotted the only penguin we saw on Stewart Island, popped up, dived, popped up a couple more times and vanished.

The weather report boded well for the trip back to Bluff. *Aurora* arrived about 8.45 a.m. and the large heap of gear on the beach was ferried out and loaded with our kayaks last, on to the top of the bins. We kept out to sea to catch the tide and when rounding 3 of the capes, the skipper killed the power as we shunted into standing waves, wind against tide. Buller's mollymawks followed us effortlessly while the few seagulls panted frantically to keep up with our 16 knots. By Bluff it had started to drizzle as we unloaded, collected vehicles and headed to the pub for showers and clean clothes.

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