

# Great Barrier Island

## - *Circumnavigation*

*by John Reeves*

Kayak round Great Barrier the week before Christmas – what better way to avoid the rush. Plans were originally for a trip along the Coromandel coast but an evening with Adventure Philosophy's Mark talking on South Georgia changed the plans. My son Tim (17) and his cousin Luke (17) had year 12 exams to get out of the way so not much time for practice runs. The SeaLink ferry leaves Auckland at 5.00 pm on Friday and our plans were to catch the ferry back from Port FitzRoy on the Tuesday. A helpful friend dropped us through the rush traffic. Kayaks carried on board and we were on our way. Our split paddle was unfinished but some help from Canoe and Kayak Manukau, epoxy and the 4 ½ hour ferry allowed the essential equipment to be finalised. Dumped on the wharf at Typhena on the South West tip of the island in the dark, kayaks secured, we walked the 15 minutes to Stray Possum Lodge for the night. You need a head lamp as Great Barrier has no electricity other than generator or solar. The island bird life is very impressive. Just at the side of the road we saw kaka, kereru, brown teal, morepork and tui.

Forecast was good, less than 10 knots and 0.5 swells. Great Barrier has a manned (actually a female) VHF radio station. We put in a 'trip plan' each morning as cell phone coverage was patchy. Oops, on the beach but no fresh water. Not like a river trip, finding fresh water required some planning. All the DOC campsites have fresh water that we purified with tablets. A friendly boatie topped our drink systems and finally we were off. After an hour we were rounding the southern tip of Cape Barrier in perfect conditions. The teenagers explored any interesting caves or narrow gaps in the rocks. I tried the fishing but no luck. We needed to achieve about 30km each day, split into three sessions of about 2 hrs. Late lunch on Kaitoke Beach, beautiful white sand for 4 kilometres. Had a swim here and I had a second one relaunching. Topped up the water systems at Awana Bay, seeing dolphins nearby.



*Campsite near Miners Head, waiting for wet gear to dry before starting the day.*

Forecast NW rising to 15 knots but then dropping again. Sheltered paddling inside Arid Island to Whangapoua Beach. There is a large lagoon here and the bar was good for surfing the kayaks. Lunch on the beach then 2 hr slog into the head wind to a small cove at the top of the island. The North Western top of the island has high bluffs and no landing spots for 8 km. A narrow gap in the rocks and tunnel gave access to the western coast. Rough conditions in swell rebounding off the bluffs made for tricky paddling for a couple of hours. Landed on the first beach south of Miners Head for the night. The eastern beaches on Great Barrier are free from rubbish but the western beaches are littered with plastic. Useful additions to the camping gear were found, clothes pegs, buckets, beach balls, rope and plastic trays. Strange how the 3 man tent gets smaller each night. It rained overnight but was clear and calm. No VHF coverage so we paddled for an hour and called in the report. Tim's back and hand were hurting so he swapped to a lightweight wing paddle, which seemed to help. Flat calm conditions allowed time to work on paddling technique as we hopped from headland to headland down the western shore. We stopped at Cliff Island for lunch and found an abandoned campsite at the top. Amazing views here but no water. Some sprint sessions seemed to prove that weight and kayak length make a big difference. How come I was allocated all the communal equipment?



*Calm conditions, Tim goes looking for white water.*

Last day dawned wet and calm. Having passed Port FitzRoy we needed to catch the freight ferry by midday at Tryphena for the trip to be complete. Dolphins in the bay slowed us up for a while but then reluctantly we set off for the last 10km.

This was a great trip and worth the 4 days of dried food. The freight ferry stops in Port FitzRoy to discharge cargo allowing time for a hamburger and chips at the wharf burger bar. This coast is obviously very subject to weather conditions except in the more sheltered Port FitzRoy area. Full emergency equipment is essential. Thanks Tim and Luke for a great trip. Luke paddled a Tui, Tim a Sequel and John an Ecobezhig.

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