

Gold Edinburgh Expedition to Great Barrier Island January 1972

by Juliana Cooke (copyright)



Mt Hobson Hiramata, photo by K.Stowell

I began planning this trip back in May of 1971. My mother and I collected bargains of tinned food. Powdered drinks and powdered milk. The fuel was carefully planned and extra fuel taken in a 20Litre tin

The route was carefully planned amongst all members of the family. The whole route took in courses in navigation, seamanship, boat handling, and Quarter Master duties.

Bad weather was allowed for with the route planned so we could shelter at Kawau until the weather cleared and we could proceed to Great Barrier. The weather was calm making our need for bad weather anchorage superfluous.

Fuel consumption was meticulously calculated so that we only need to refuel once on the way to Great Barrier, at Kawau. The rest of the fuel, along with top-ups of food, were to be purchased on the Barrier.

We arrived at Kaiaraara Bay on the Barrier and anchored just off a small point that had the remains of a grape vine growing where a homestead stood and where the track to Mt Hobson began.

With twenty feet of clear blue under our keel we began to discuss how to ascend Mt Hobson, what to take with us and whereabouts the track started.

Mum and I prepared food, lots of sandwiches, and drinks, Raro and Refresh to sustain the hungry explorers on their mountain assault. To record this momentous event I helped Dad check and load his camera equipment. When everything was checked and checked again, I helped load it all into the dinghies, spreading gear and people evenly between two 2M long Pram dinghies.

Joining my family, I began the long row ashore, about 750M, Kaiaraara Bay is very shallow, especially on its Northern side and *Robyn Gae* has a one metre draft so we needed to anchor far enough off shore to ensure she didn't run aground at low water.

We scrambled ashore and walked through a neglected garden of old fruit trees and straggling grape vines until we reached the Main Road, or rather a horse and cart track pretending to be the Island's main thoroughfare.



Track/road walking to Mt Hobson

While following this well-worn 'road' we crossed the same stream three times. Eventually we found a sign with the encouraging message "*Mount Hobson 3hrs*"



The signs

So we follow the sign, cross the stream again and continued walking along the track under a cool leafy canopy of tall native trees and ferns. Finally we came across a clearing in which a few Kauri trees had been planted in a little grove. In the middle of this little groups of Kauri Rickers, was a phone which we had to use to call the Forestry Department to inform them that we were about to make the assault on Mt Hobson. Permission granted, we resumed our trek.



We forded that stream fifteen times. As we climbed the country became very rugged and stoney with the track at times dwindling to a mere 30 cm wide. It was at these narrow points that we had a 50metre cliff on one side and a sheer drop of 50 metres on the other and the narrow track was nerve shattering. The most spectacular part was looking out through the trees to the other side of the gorge to a black basalt cliff towering above the Manuka trees. This was surely 'goat-and-tiger country'.



Basalt cliffs in Windy Canyon

Back in the old days, in the 1880's Great Barrier was full of huge Kauri trees, but now all that is left are massive 2metre diameter stumps and the whitened skeletons of dead Kauri like accusing fingers pointing skywards.

The inner country of the Barrier is easy to get lost in as the interior very wild, broken, thickly scrubbed and there are wild boars in there. We know this because we encountered four gun-wielding hunters on their way down to the coast.

Re-afforestation is taking place with new pine forests being established where there once were large stands of Kauri.

The stream running down from Mt Hobson has two Kauri Dams built on it. One is in a very good state of preservation, but we did not visit this one, but as we climbed we crossed the upper dam. This dam is about 80 feet high and has some planks missing to allow the stream to flow freely. The planks are about 1½ inches thick and of rough hewn Kauri logs.



Walking on the Kaiaraara Kauri Dam 1972 and Restored Kauri Dam Photo by K.Stowell

Trees in this part of Great Barrier were mainly manuka, small pine stands, Kauri seedlings and rimu. Nikau palms were frequent along the track. The ferns and Puriri trees tended to be in the shade near the stream. There were different types of ground cover vegetation such as Bush Lawyer, ivy creepers and native nettles.



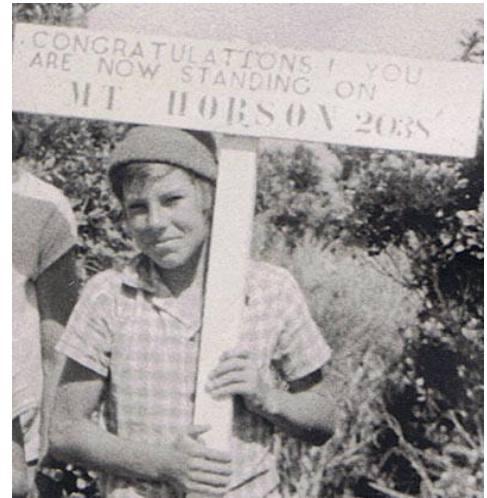
At one particularly tricky part of the track we had to cross a rotting log which had a wasps nest at one end. We all crossed safely, until my little sister began her crossing. After five people had crossed the wasps had become stirred up and unfortunately she was stung on the back. Mum, who had the First Aid kit, gave Amelia medical attention and was instructed by our St John's Voluntary Aid Nurse in the correct procedure of wasp stings.

Half way up the track we stopped to take photos of the bay in which our boat was anchored. This was a good excuse to soothe Amelia's sting and have a snack of sandwiches and cordial,

About 200 metres from the top we had to climb almost vertically up tree roots that made a natural living ladder. The top! Yay! Made it. The top was a knob of old basalt rock about 10 foot x 10 foot square.

The view from here was well worth the climb as you could see the whole of Great Barrier, the Coromandel Peninsular, the Mercury Islands, Waiheke and Kawau.

There was another family already on the summit and one of their group took our photo with my brother Louis holding the sign.



The ascent took a muscle aching two and a half hours, but the descent took a knee pounding one and half hours. On the way down we stopped for a drink at a waterfall and had a welcome refreshing of pure water.

When we came to the wasps nest we held fern branches over our heads and this seemed to distract the wasps so no stings this time.

Almost at the bottom of the mountain we met two guys carrying rifles, they were intending to go pig hunting. We wished them luck and carried on downhill.

The tide was out when we reached the dinghy so we had to push and pull it over the rocks into the water, get in and row, against a head wind, to our boat.

We had to set two anchors tonight as the wind was at near gale force. Dad set the marine radio to 2182, the marine emergency frequency, in case we needed urgent assistance owing to the high wind.

Returning directly from Great Barrier to Westhaven, we kept the RT tuned to the emergency frequency so we could respond to any distress calls, or make any ourselves.

The whole family returned home very brown and with a well-deserved sense of pride in our achievement, as it is not everyone who goes to Great Barrier that climbs Hiramata, Mt Hobson.