

Cruise to North Cape 20-24/1/2003

We're back from a 5-day cruise to North Cape, the most northerly point in New Zealand. Our traveling companions included a Kiwi family of 5+1, the trip organizer, two American couples (us, plus the UU minister and wife) and crew of 2. We motored north from Whangaroa (pronounced Fangaraoa) above the Bay of Islands, a popular sailing and holiday area, along a very wild and isolated coastline-lots of cliffs, volcanic rocks, trees, crashing waves, sheltered bays and some green meadows. Edie, at night we could hear the moreporks (NZ "owls") calling and the cicadas in the trees on the shore.

This is really rustic NZ: large areas, both coastal and inland, are reachable only by boat or "bush-bashing." NZ is almost all hilly and the hills tend to be both very steep and packed with brush, which makes bush-bashing (walking through trackless terrain) a tough way to cover any distance. But from the sea it is beautiful sight, and frequent little sandy-beach coves make it attractive for cruising.

We drove about five hours north with Dick and Mary Weston-Jones, the UU Minister and wife, to Whangaroa. It's a coastal town of a few houses, a small store, a nice pub and the game fish club wharf. There we turned over the car to a couple and their kids who were leaving the boat. They in turn left the car for us in Tutukaka, a couple of hours down the coast and the homeport of the boat, the motor vessel WAIRANGI. It was built in 1934 as a rich man's toy but has had a varied career since - pilot boat, fireboat, and now a charter boat. The original diesel is still the motivator. It was well equipped (fathometer, radar, radio, autopilot, GPS) but rustic and round-bottomed. Rolled a lot in rough seas, but only two people got a bit unwell. We shared the main cabin with the Weston-Jones' and slept on mattresses on the floor, sort of like a kids' sleeping party. The family had the fo'c'sle, the organizer, Henri van Roon, and the mate, Derek Sutton shared the aft cabin. The captain was left with the kitchen/dining room/game room bench. There was one head and a minimal shower. Amazingly we shared these limited facilities with little stress.

The captain, Lew Ritchie, is one of Australasia's pre-eminent marine biologists, with broad interests in music, history and general living. The trip organizer was born in The Netherlands and came to NZ when he was 12. He was an environmental planner for some years, but now makes his living as a financial adviser. He also has served/serves on many government commissions (he's now one of three non-MD members of the national medical complaint/qualifications board) and is a member of the UU church here. The Kiwi family was Hugh Lusk, Christine and their 3 children, plus Katie (child of the previous passengers who stayed on). Hugh is an ecologist-professor. Christine was a city planner, is a "primary care-giver" and activist, and is about to enter electoral politics. She'll stand for office as a left-winger -- would that could be done in the US! Annabel and Katie are 12 and nice giggly girls; Sam (15) and Harry (10) are demon fishermen-really a nice family, delightful kids.

The captain and mate (who also holds a captain's license) are both expert divers, so when we anchored in a bay they would don scuba gear and roll over the side to pick up dozens of scallops. Those were the appetizers. The two boys fished nearly every waking moment, while their dad loyally chopped bait and cleaned the catch. We ate fish that went straight from the hook to the frying pan. Meal preparations were a three-ring circus with Mary, Christine and Carolyn cooperating without a particular plan in a space about the size of the motor home kitchen (but less well-equipped). Clean up carried on the tradition with the men helping with those duties. Breakfasts included cereal, fruit yogurt, eggs in some form, toast done over a burner - served dry and crisp English style. Lunch was usually cheese, sandwiches, veggies and fruit. Dinner was the big production with copious entrées -what we would classify as appetizers- such as mashed avocado on crackers with smoked mussels or scallops sautéed with soy, sweet chili sauce and wine, cheese, pickles, etc. The mains were sausages & mashed potatoes, fried fish with rice, mince stew on pasta, baked fish with rice, all with coleslaw or salad. There was some kinds of dessert, referred to as pudding by the kids, such as fruit, Christmas pudding or cookies. Add some gorgeous scenery, fine Kiwi wine and beer, delightful conversation, a few odds and ends, and you get very cheerful and well-fed folks.

We spent nights in small bays and ducked in and out of several others. We had aboard kayaks and snorkel gear but it was too cool and rough to do much in the water. We did stop at some major silica sand dunes at Parengarenga Harbor. During a long rough stretch past the Bay of Islands on the last night Harry (ten years old) spotted a distress flare behind us. Lew called it in to the Coast Guard, which subsequently reported that a boat in distress had been located. It was over 20 kilometers behind us when Harry spotted the flare. Lew was presented with a problem: under Admiralty law and humanity there is nothing more basic than rendering assistance at sea, but doing so could mean an all night slog and search in the storm. Not good for him, the boat, or his passengers. Fortunately a Coast Guard boat that was much closer had also seen the flare and did rescue the distressed.

One observation we would make, from intensive conversations on the boat with a very aware bunch of Kiwis and from other conversations elsewhere over the past few weeks: many Kiwis see G. Bush and present US policy as (to quote the captain) "utterly mad." Obviously these are very perceptive people.

Jack and Carolyn Salmon
Observing Kiwis in
Auckland, NZ

Jack and Carolyn Salmon
Fleeing the New American Empire
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