

Whangaroa Interlude

Bay of Islands to Whangaroa and back

Annie Hill



I slipped my mooring on 15 February and sailed out of Matauwhi Bay in the lightest of SE airs heading towards Whangaroa Harbour. I decided to pass between Ninepin Island and the Purerua Peninsula, which was a mistake, due to a nasty joggle that threw us about and the wind coming along the shore, making us very close hauled, but after that, it was delightful sailing all the way to the Cavalli Is. The pass, which looks tricky on the chart, was quite straightforward and, with the afternoon well advanced, we had a

nice little beat into pretty Horseshoe/Papatara Bay, where I dropped the hook for the night.

We left about 0830 and were soon bowling along in S3, on a sparkling sea in bright sunshine my ideal conditions. However, when we turned towards Whangaroa, the wind died under the land, so we motor sailed for a while. The wind returned and we sailed almost the whole way into Rere Bay, where I anchored in a shallow spot towards the head of the bay, celebrating with some bubbly. Astonishingly, I could get an internet signal for weather forecasts.

Whangaroa harbour has many anchorages and is a cruising ground in its own right and I spent the



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FanShi sailing into Whangaroa
(courtesy of Brigadoon)

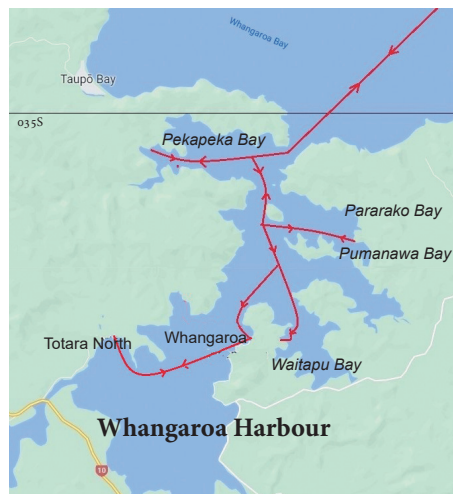
next few weeks exploring it. This first anchorage was beautiful and I relaxed, admiring the scenery, watching the birds around me, and the boats come and go. I spent time in the galley: slowly cooking and then savouring my meals is one of my delights.

On Saturday, I went ashore to try the rather daunting ascent of the Duke's Nose, a flat area atop a nearby cliff. I had last done it some 15 years ago, with someone who could give me a hand if necessary, and wasn't sure if I'd still be up to it. However, I succeeded without too much difficulty. A steel rail is provided to help you up the final, near vertical part of the climb, which made things easier, although I did think that perhaps sandals hadn't been the best choice of footwear. It was well worth the effort and there were fantastic views from the top. I spent some time wandering around and taking in different vistas.

I was very hot and sweaty after the walk, so I bunged up the cockpit drains with a couple of champagne corks (exactly the right size) and filled it with seawater. It made for a delightful bath after which I felt wondrously clean.

The next day was calm and sunny, but having 'conquered' the Duke's Nose, I felt ready for a change, so more in hope than expectation, pulled up the sail, got the anchor and waited to see what would happen. Very little, so I motored for a while until I reached the end of the Bay. Once we had cleared Takahi Point, conditions improved and we could sail. Passing east of Peach Island, I sailed into Waitapu Bay, and dropped anchor off the west shore, below a point sticking

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Views from the Duke's Nose

out from the land. At LW, the keel sank into the mud for about half an hour: I hoped it might clean off some of the barnacles!

I wanted good shelter because it was time to do some varnishing. When I built the boat, knowing my innate slothfulness, I tried to make tools, epoxy, paint, etc relatively accessible. They're all stowed in the lazarette under the cockpit, but still require an effort of will to retrieve, but in fact, I soon got out what I needed and was sanding and scraping the foredeck. I felt quite pleased with myself and celebrated with sun downers in the cockpit in the warm, calm evening.

It rained overnight, but everything soon dried off, although it was a bit breezy in the afternoon. The same happened the next day and I realised that the sea breeze was finding a gap and being accelerated to about a F5, making varnish difficult to apply. I'm a great fan of two-part polyurethane finishes, but they're much more difficult to apply well than conventional varnish. I'm resigned to a 'ten-foot job' (looks good from a distance), but warm sun in conjunction with a fresh breeze makes even that difficult to attain, with the coating drying almost instantly and the wind threatening to blow over the container of varnish. I decided to find a more sheltered stop and in the morning, before the wind picked up, we moved round to the SE end of Parareko Bay, which was not only much less windy but a lot prettier. We had calm, sunny weather for the next few days, and I made good progress, enjoying the job now that there was no 'howling gale' to contend with.

Parareko Bay seemed to offer good shelter from all directions



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Another fine day on 1 March, and with the varnish now hard enough for gentle use, I motored over to the water barge and filled up my containers. This is a wonderful facility, because none of the wharves in Whangaroa Harbour have taps and I



didn't want to use the marina. A natural spring bubbles out from the floor of the harbour and a buoy is moored over it, with a pipe somehow secured to the spring. It's designed so that a boat can tie alongside, but I reckoned it was easier to anchor nearby and row over. I soon filled up all my containers and then we sailed up towards Whangaroa township and anchored in Ratcliffe Bay. Once again, *FanShi's* small size and shallow draught paid off, and I could go in close to the beach, inside the crowd of moorings.

The water buoy



Ratcliffe Bay

I launched *Fantan* and rowed ashore, finding a slipway to tie up to. With so many things closed due to the pandemic, and no tourists about, Whangaroa, never a throbbing hotspot, felt just this side of weird. I asked the proprietor of the pub about shopping – there was a window opening onto a room



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lined with refrigerated display cabinets and I wondered if he was selling a few groceries – but his response was extremely unhelpful. Not a great introduction to the place. I walked along the harbour for about a mile, before coming back, but there wasn't really a lot to see, apart from the little shop that I remembered, now firmly closed down, and a rather charming cottage.

I stayed there a few days in my comfortable anchorage. The small marina was happy to let me use their laundrette, so I gathered my grubby clothes and bedding, pushed it into my backpack, rowed ashore and walked to the marina. I negotiated the gate, but couldn't get into the laundry. In due course, I discovered it was locked because the washer had broken down so that was the end of that idea. It started to rain as I walked back, and I consoled myself with the thought that it would have been difficult getting the washing dry. I emptied my pack, refilled it with recycling and walked back into the village. I had agreed to meet an acquaintance at the Sport Fishing Club that evening, but he called to say he'd heard that some recent customers had had Covid and he felt we would be better to stay away. I was relieved not to go back one more time. In truth, I found the settlement depressing, probably because its *raison d'être* is tourism and there weren't any. I decided to head across to Totara North next day.



Okura Bay

In the morning, I lazily raised about half the sail and made my leisurely way across the harbour. Entering Okura Bay, I realised that it was much better protected than it appeared from the chart and, once more taking advantage of *FanShi's* shallow draught, I tucked us well in, out of harm's way. We would be sheltered in anything other than a strong southerly wind. Considering that the wind had been solidly in the east for weeks, this seemed an unlikely eventuality. A showery afternoon gave me the perfect excuse to write letters and read my book.

Monday was a pleasant day and knowing that I could get as much water as I wanted, I decided to tackle the laundry. After washing by hand for more years than I care to think about, I usually strenuously avoid it, but I found the ritual surprisingly satisfying and that washing for one person instead of two takes a lot less time. Hand wrung clothes are so wet when hung out, that they take ages to dry. I often used to think that given the choice between a washer or a spin dryer, I would take

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Totara North, alternative anchorage

decrepit buildings and a little museum. However, the people I encountered were really friendly and helpful, pointing out where there was a tap (HW only) and chatting pleasantly. The old buildings were interesting and photogenic, there were some very attractive wooden houses and some stunning trees, draped with mosses and with picturesquely distorted branches. I noticed several other places where I could have anchored, but none quite so sheltered, especially with the east breeze which was blowing quite freshly.

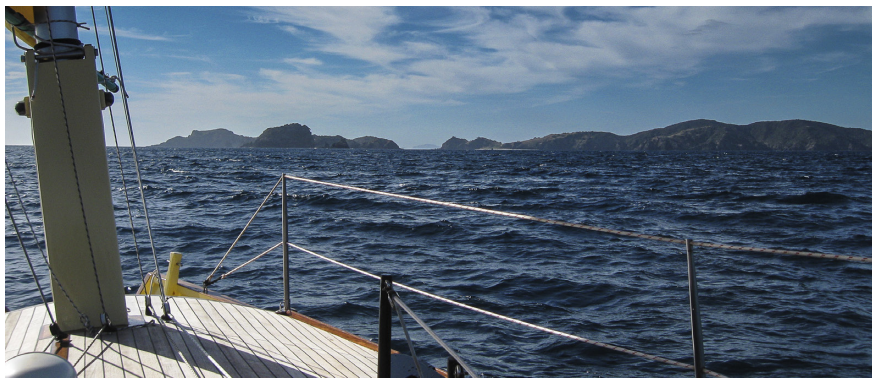
In due course, I found myself at an old pub, the Gumdiggers Inn. Gumdiggers were people who dug into the swamps looking for gum from long-dead kauri. The trees constantly ooze the gum, with which they cover damage. The gum survives in the swamps and was an excellent ingredient for varnish. A man with a shovel could earn a living, digging it up: hard, filthy, uncertain work, people must have been pretty desperate to do it. Apparently, the pub was struggling due to the pandemic and lack of tourists. I bought a beer and some hot chips – the only vegetarian item on the menu. I sat on a covered deck, backing onto the mangroves and overlooking the estuary. It was pathetically deserted. The lady brought me my chips and sat down with me. She was a mine of information about the area and I thoroughly

the latter any time. Today I was lucky, the clothes were all dry by sundown.

A day or so later, I rowed ashore and had a delightful walk through the somewhat dilapidated Totara North. It used to be a hive of activity with boat builders and a sawmill, but those industries have died, leaving behind some



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Heading towards the Cavelli Islands

enjoyed our conversation. The locals were starting to come in. My new friend left me to attend to them, whilst I finished my beer and then strolled back.

I stayed several more days in this good anchorage, but the forecast was finally looking to give me a chance to get back to the Bay. It was over 35 miles to the first reasonable anchorage and I needed at least a NE wind. *FanShi*, like her owner, is short and beamy, and neither of us is at our best beating to windward. I moved closer to the entrance, hoping that if I left sufficiently early, I should be able to carry the land breeze most of the way to Flat Island.

I headed out at 0530, finding a nice breeze in the main harbour. By the time I got to the entrance, it was light and we sailed for another mile or so before the breeze died away. Unfortunately, when it came back, it was southeast. Suffice it to say that it was a long and frustrating day. The breeze came and went all day: sometimes we were running happily, sometimes motoring in flat calm, sometimes struggling to lay our course and motor sailing. Motoring in *FanShi* requires either patience or the acceptance of a lot of noise. I hate noise, so we generally motor at 2-3 knots with the engine on low revs. There was a big, lazy swell and I realised that with our slow speed, it had actually been lifting us up bodily, closer and closer to



the land. I found that I had to head well offshore to counteract it and it was more than a little disconcerting. We finally dropped the hook in Otaio Bay, Urupukapuka Island, at 1850. It had taken eight hours and 40 minutes to cover the 36 miles, with only five hours under sail alone. It was good to get the hook down.

Back in the Bay of Islands