

Summer 2021 aboard *Zest*

Around the North Island of New Zealand

Tom and Vicky Jackson



Tom and Vicky Jackson overlooking Whangaroa Harbour

We have been round New Zealand's North Island several times in *Sunstone*, but 2021 was our first attempt to do so in *Zest*. The sail up the west coast was our fastest ever, in ten passages north and south over these waters. We departed Nelson Marina early on 22 January 2021. From Farewell Spit for nine hours, it was a wet

close reach with three reefs and the No.4 jib in a westerly 28-32kts and a 3m swell. Dinner was bread and jam for Tom, bread and hummus for Vicky. By midnight the wind was down to 22kts, then 15kts, carrying us all the way to Cape Reinga. A light south westerly took us through the strong tides at the top and down the east coast. We anchored in Whangaroa Harbour nearly 500nm in three days and two hours from Nelson. We needed a very long night's sleep and two further days to catch up.

We walked and climbed up the Duke's Nose, a classic one hour tramp, in Whangaroa Harbour. It is a steep bush



walk until near the top, when it becomes a rock climb. The former chain is now a solid, metal bar to make ascending the near vertical rock face somewhat easier. The views at the top are expansive across the coves and nooks of this beautiful anchorage.

After rest and recovery and a brief diversion to see Roly and Consie Lennox-King (RCC) in the Bay of Islands, we headed back north. Great Exhibition Bay,

Zest anchored under the Duke's Nose



Tom descending the Duke's Nose



south from North Cape, has a shoreline that could rival a tropical island's. The white sand beach, backed by dunes and marram grass, sweeps for kilometres around the bay, with almost turquoise water in the shallows. We anchored twice off Karikari Moana's spectacular beach. It beckoned for a long walk, but a strong easterly day breeze prevented any shore excursion.

Houhora, in Rangaunu Bay, with a tricky river entrance, 4 knot tides, a shallow, twisting and narrow channel, tested our pilotage skills. Upstream we found a mooring as the

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Vicky on Ninety Mile Beach

water gurgled and swirled past the hull. Rows of houses lined the river, stretching for kilometres along the banks. Pukenui was at one time a small, far north, wetland settlement, with fishing as its mainstay; it is now full of holiday-makers.

We sailed south to Mangonui where we took the opportunity for a road trip with our sailing friend, Rob. The glorious stretch of the unspoilt dunes and views of Ninety Mile Beach were marred for us by the deep ruts left by vehicle tracks. The walk out to Cape Reinga lighthouse, high on its point, to watch the seas breaking offshore on Columbia Bank and see the mixing of the tides from the Tasman Sea and the Pacific Ocean gave a change of perspective, having experienced the same from a yacht at sea level.

A 12 hour sail from Mangonui brought us to the showers, washing machines, fresh water and fuel at Opua Marina in the Bay of Islands. The first seven and a half

Breaking waters on Columbia Banks, seen from Cape Reinga



hours down the coast were slow going, beating into an easterly 15-20kts. After days of sun, it rained for two, but not before we walked the varied and pretty 6km coastal track from Opuia to Paihia, our favourite short walk in the North Island.

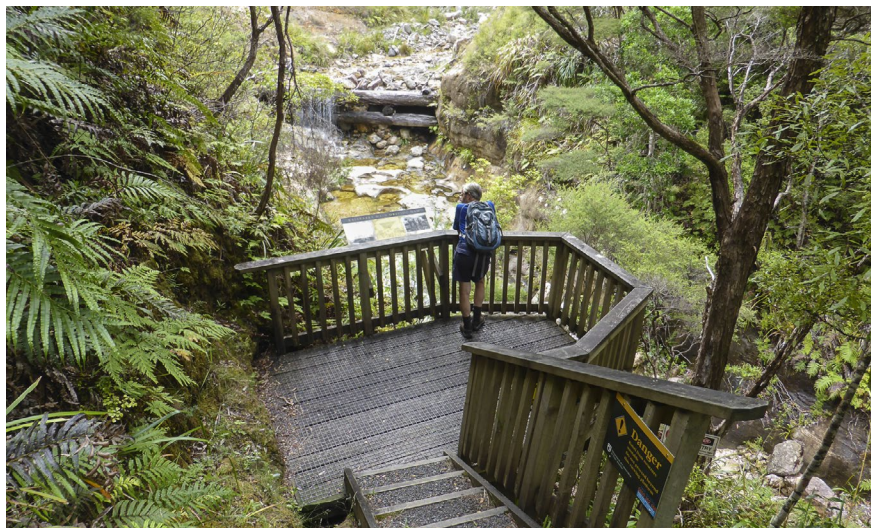
Two long sailing days past the islands and indented east coast, with one night anchored at Tutukaka, got us to Great Barrier Island in mid-February, before some strong easterly winds. With gale force E then N winds 35-40kts and driving rain, we hunkered down at anchor in Port Fitzroy. There was some activity: constantly monitoring *Zest's* position and that of other boats, a few maintenance jobs, reading and watching films on the computer. Tom took an outing in the rain to scrub the teak decks; there was no shortage of rinsing rain water. Before the deep low, we spent a convivial afternoon with Graeme and Kath on *Windjammer*, another Nelson yacht, watching Prada Cup racing between teams Luna Rossa and Ineos.

The walk to the old Kauri Dam is through lush semi-tropical vegetation with huge punga (tree ferns) and tall, 'straight as a die' kauri trees. The track had been upgraded: no more tree roots, slippery leaves and loose earth, nor small stream crossings. But the 566 steps up to the dam over 80 minutes were still there. The dam is a wonderful example of pioneer engineering. A wooden dam was built, behind which the loggers man-handled huge kauri logs. The dam

'Straight as a die' kauri tree



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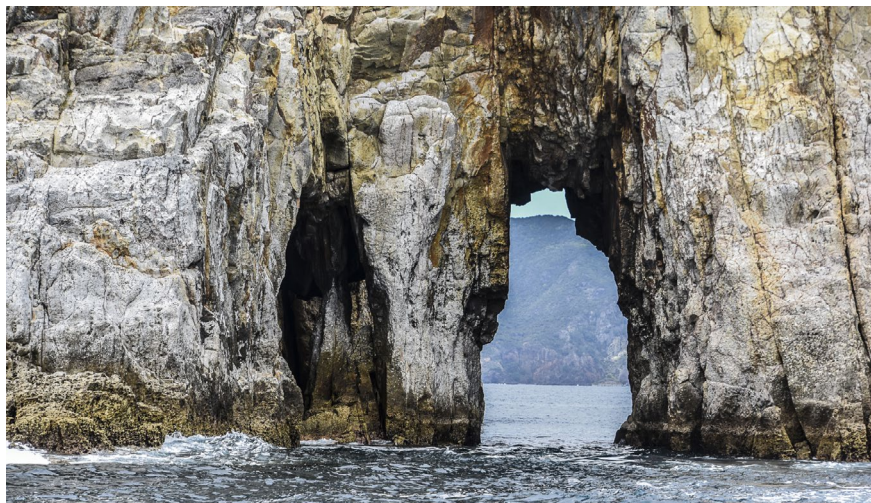


Tom at the Kauri Dam, Great Barrier Island

filled up with rain and river water, then part of the dam was tripped open and all the 'stored' trees shot down the river to Kaiarara Bay to be shipped out.

Before we left Nelson one of our targets had been to visit the east side of Great Barrier Island. This coast is exposed and in the prevailing summer easterlies anchoring is often not tenable. We managed two nights, one in The Cove on Rakitu Island, a pretty spot, with exceptionally clear water, caves and interesting rock formations, along with green rolling swards. The second night was off Oruawharo

Rock formations in The Cove, Rakitu Island





Oruawharo Beach break

Beach, with white sand, turquoise water and the constant noise of the surf break. The 'break' meant that landing and getting off the beach was difficult. To get ashore for a walk Vicky donned her lifejacket and put her camera into a waterproof bag. Watching the waves she pulled hard on the oars, then surfed the dinghy towards the beach. It was going well, until she stepped out of the dinghy; it turned broadside on, she slipped on an invisible rock and completed an inelegant dumping. But it was a warm day and the camera was dry in its pouch. The walk/run on the beach was lovely: soft white sand, a pair of black oystercatchers and dotterel. Waiting for bigger waves to pass, Vicky timed her relaunch and shot out through the smaller surf. She was tired on her return, from the nervous energy expended more than the exercise.

The sail across the Colville Channel was the perfect combination of a broad reach in 12kts, warm sunshine, with the rugged Coromandel Peninsula as the backdrop. One night off the eastern end of Waiheke Island was followed by two in Islington Bay, Rangitoto Island.

Berthing in Auckland always feels like 'coming home'. Our allocated berth in Westhaven Marina was just one dock away from where we had lived on board *Sunstone*, for six years. We caught up with friends, including the original owners of *Zest*, appeared on The Rock radio station (we were berthed alongside an electric motor boat sponsored by The Rock), shopped, walked into the city and through the America's Cup Village.

When sailing, we have learnt the importance of planning, but also to be ready to change that plan. Listening to the late night news, it was announced that Auckland was about to go into lockdown; we made a speedy get away before the deadline.

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Some longer sailing days led to anchorages at islands off the east coast of Coromandel Peninsula, Great Mercury Island, crowded and rolly Mayor Island. On 3 March we berthed in Tauranga Marina. The early hours of Friday morning required another speedy departure, this time to the land to avoid possible incoming water, with a tsunami warning after an earthquake off East Cape. We were woken at 0300 by a knock on the hull. Jenny told us to follow her and Ted to their car to drive to higher land. We had met this couple the day before, yachties based in Tauranga Marina. We drove to their son's house on a slight rise, looking at our phones for reports following the quake. The warnings were lifted by 0630 and we were back in our bunks aboard.

The next day, we needed more exercise than walking up and down the very long docks. We rented upright pedal bikes and headed to Mount Maunganui. The resort town was humming on a sunny Saturday morning. We locked the bikes and started our walk on the base track around The Mount and then began climbing. We took it slowly, to reach the summit, 232m with varied views - the waters of the Bay of Plenty, sprawling Mount Maunganui town, cranes and ships in the large port, the narrow, tidal harbour entrance and sandy beaches backed with pine trees. The route down was by an even steeper track with lots of steps. We still had to bike back to Tauranga, 10 km away. On board we knew that we had achieved our goals - more exercise, biking and walking.



Mount Maunganui

We next planned to sail across the Bay of Plenty, around East Cape with a probable stop in Gisborne or Napier. On the morning of 8 March an expected south westerly kicked in. There were brief lulls in the SW 25kts. Backing out of an unfamiliar, confined, wind and tide-swept marina berth is always a challenge. We just 'escaped', Tom holding the bow on the dock before jumping on board while

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Vicky steered, backing out with some speed. We were only centimetres clear of the pile before the bow fell away.

Out in the Bay of Plenty the wind was gusting to 32 knts. Our yacht lived up to her name, as we ran down wind under only the small jib. Off Whakaari/White Island, we hoisted the main with three, then two, then one slab. The deep run was still fast, until 2015. Within five minutes the wind shifted 180° and we were beating into a north easterly 15-18 knots. And so it continued all night.

We stayed in slightly less wind close along the coast, tacking every hour or so, a dead beat to East Cape. After each tack one of us dozed down below, napping for 20, 30 or 50 minutes, while the other kept watch. It was similar to two-handed racing. We rounded East Cape at 0700. The wind stayed in the northerly sector, 8-16kts, to give a more pleasant beam to broad reach, with bright stars through the next night.

In our travels around the world we have bought and often stored tins of food. Supper, sailing past Gisborne, was tinned corned beef hash bought in Canada. Vicky has never believed 'best before' dates; these tins were dated June 2016 - and still delicious!

We berthed at the Napier Sailing Club (NSC) at 0900 two days later. We have always been made very welcome at NSC. Dee, the Manager, came down to take our bow line. Standing on the dock she looked at Vicky and said; "I know you from somewhere." She did. Vicky had taught Dee at Southampton Solent University back in 1995.

Our eight day stay at the NSC was longer than expected with a seasonal change from summer to autumn. For seven days there was a daily ritual, watching America's Cup racing in the Club. The win was a masterful team outcome for New

More exercise, including cycling outside Napier



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Zealand. Otherwise we filled the days with maintenance work, walking the steps and steep streets of The Bluff and around Ahuriri, the suburb close to the fishing harbour. We hired bikes one day and rode a flat 50kms, taking in Marine Parade and limestone tracks past orchards and wetlands.



Oh for indestructable burgee tails!

more than 18kts. Weather predictions were right but we had a few problems on the way.

The 'bang' came only half an hour after departure. We were watching the buoys flashing around the port entrance and a ship with tugs entering the port. We passed near one of the lit channel markers - bang. The engine stopped. This was not a good start. We had hit a fishing pot, not usually placed so close to ship channels. The engine restarted, but had the prop or shaft been damaged, would the engine continue, was there any other damage? Apparently not as we motored on. After Cape Kidnappers we reached in a SE or ESE wind, mostly motor sailing in 6-13kts, but with a 2m swell. The sparsely populated Wairarapa coast is one we find eerie, barren and inhospitable. There is no refuge until Wellington or Picton. For large sections of the coast, up to four miles off the land, the charts say 'unsurveyed'. The stars on both nights were magnificent. The moon was a narrow crescent and set by midnight so the small jewels shone with all their intensity. Land tourists visit dark-



The heights of rugby with a weak wifi signal

We departed Napier on 18 March at 2200 with reasonable winds; SE at first down the Wairarapa coast, then southerly after we turned the corner into Cook Strait, with nothing



sky areas - sailors just look up. The leaping dolphins were a joy too. We talk to them like children and feel such happiness watching their antics.

Cook Strait gave us more wind aft of the beam, but nothing excessive. The sailing was fast and enjoyable; until we noticed some water in the bilges. First we bailed out and mopped up. Then we searched for the leak. In the end, we found that water had flowed steadily from the engine water pump. We had used the engine quite a bit down the Wairarapa coast. The engine seemed OK, but clearly a seal had failed.

We were glad that the two-day passage was nearing completion on Saturday afternoon off Alligator Head, Guards Bay, in The Marlborough Sounds. However, in the end, we had to dig deep. It was only after inspecting three bays that we eventually found a protected haven. The first was too windy, the second was full of fishing boat moorings and too deep, at the third we stopped. It was an early night for us, but not the long sleep we desired. The wind, although not strong, shifted overnight, giving a short chop. We were glad to depart early next morning. The last night on board was at Catherine Cove, D'Urville Island, on a club mooring. The bay gave us a calm day and night, with bird song and a long uninterrupted sleep. But before that Tom managed to renew the bearings and seals in the water pump, with limited tools and his trusty portable vice. Spare parts are important.

Early on 22 March we transited French Pass at 'slack' tide, but the current was still running against us at 4 knts. After that we had a lovely sail, reaching down into Tasman Bay, before motoring for the last 10 miles home to Nelson. Over 8 weeks and 4 days we had circumnavigated North Island, covering 1,635 miles.

Silver fern artefact,
Great Barrier Island

