

We Didn't Have a Clew

Recalling 'the beast' in North Island, New Zealand

Jim Lott



Karin and Jim Lott

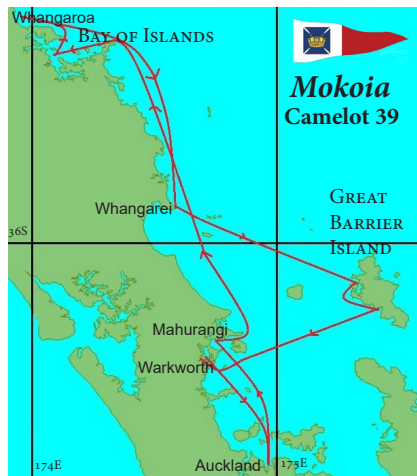
Although our ocean wandering days are over now we are into our 70's, we have not yet swallowed the anchor entirely. Karin really likes our current yacht *Mokoia*. She is much smaller than *Victoria* and, oh joy, no spinnaker!

Karin and I have a different perspective on fun with spinnakers. I happily recall the exhilaration of *Victoria* charging at 14 knots over a sea covered in white caps. Karin talks of being tyrannised by a 2000 square foot 'beast'. Certainly there were a few moments of stress, particularly when the time came to douse the billowing kite in an increasing F5. Karin would steer as I worked the foredeck with our two young sons helping. Then there was an unannounced microburst near Japan when Karin was alone on the helm with the 'beast', the only time we ever had the mast touch the water.

After Christmas, we sailed north in *Mokoia* to the Bay of Islands for our national summer holiday and to celebrate the arrival of 2020 with several friends from school days, including Roland Lennox-King (RCC).

'When the cat's away', as soon as Karin drove back to Auckland for a few days, Roland arrived in his dinghy with four sail-bags from somewhere in his formidable boat shed on the foreshore. It is not the first time I have been led astray by my old friend. When he told us several years ago that we should buy *Mokoia*, we found ourselves with two yachts.

The breeze was light and with help from our school friend Rory McDonald, his wife Joanie and Roland's wife Consie, we tried out the selection of splendid spinnakers. I could sense the



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life each would bring to *Mokoia*, a sedate cruising yacht. Then I remembered that the passing years have had an effect on my physique. I also knew that Karin would soon return.

The last sail was a blooper, an 'extra' no longer permitted for racing. It looked pretty odd so we hoisted it using the tack as head. It looked worse. We tied the clew onto the halyard, and it looked ridiculous no matter what we used as a clew. After trying it upside down and inside out we decided on a more 'tactical' approach, the clew became the tack, and the tack was appointed clew. But the leech (now appointed luff) was too long so we tied a few knots in it and behold, the sail looked surprisingly good, even if the word 'clew' had disappeared inside the knots.

I knew Karin would need a bit of time to get used to having another sail even if



Recycled blooper

it was more gennaker than spinnaker, so I sent her a photo. Her reply "The colour matches the cabin top" seemed like guarded acceptance. In light winds we continued to experiment with our new toy as we sailed the Northland coast to Whangaroa and back to Great Barrier, the jewel of cruising near Auckland.

In late January each year, the Mahurangi Cruising Club organises a marvellous traditional yacht regatta. Just 20 miles north of Auckland, the ability to admire yachts built anytime

in the past 130 years, many magnificently restored to better than original, attracts a huge range of participants and onlookers. The evening barbeque amongst the pohutukawa trees on the foreshore sees sailors, designers, builders and enthusiasts from all corners of the world enjoying wine and salty yarns.

We were not going to miss it, arriving at the sheltered harbour a couple of days early. The tide was right for a six mile journey up a shallow river to the pretty town of Warkworth, where we met friends for coffee. The tide had turned by the time we departed. The narrow channel snakes through trees but is clearly marked with beacons. Towards the entrance the estuary widens with extensive mud-banks port and starboard so we carefully followed the buoys. With the tidal current adding about three knots, avoiding the bottom was top of mind. Just when all seemed



River pitfalls

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under control we slid to a halt; the usual motor and helm manoeuvres did not help at all.

A check around with a lead-line (actually a winch handle tied to a length of line) showed half a metre to starboard and 2.5 metres under the port gunwale. The prospect of the keel ending up higher than the deck was not encouraging so we checked whether there was enough gaffer-tape on board to seal up the possible inlets in the cockpit to keep out the muddy water.

Rolling out the headsail took advantage of a light breeze from port to help stay as upright as possible. After a couple of hours, inspection from the dinghy showed sufficient mud had built up to port of the keel to allow us to relax a bit, if sitting at 20° all afternoon can be called relaxing. The red buoy ahead to starboard mocked us from its perch on the mud-bank; apparently it had been too lazy to shift when the channel changed.

As the sun dipped we arrived back in Mahurangi Harbour along with hundreds of craft, many traditional, many built of kauri, which had travelled from Auckland and beyond. Fortunately for us our undignified day on the mud had not been witnessed by any of them. Over the weekend the F3 to F4 breeze was perfect for sailors and spectators.

Mokoia anchored not far from *Okahu Bay* (Tim and Ginny LeCouteur, RCC) and close to *Victoria* (RCC). It was a great pleasure to catch up with Angus and Laura Watson (RCC), who had recently returned from a Pacific Islands cruise. It was a shakedown for them and their children



Kiwi barbeque



Victoria and *Mokoia*, Mahurangi Harbour

after buying *Victoria* from us in 2019. Karin and I are delighted that the Watsons had the opportunity to sail in New Zealand and to head offshore and enjoy the islands and cultures of the south-west Pacific, at a time when that was still possible.