

Introduction

From 29 December 2014 to 23 January 2015 Sally, Noel, Elly and Gerard 'did' the Northland part of the Te Araroa Trail, from Cape Reinga to Waipu Cove. Sally and Elly walked the whole length, while Gerard and Noel accompanied them until Whananaki North.

We were lucky with Noel as our support person and the availability of a car (until Whananaki North). This meant that we were able to walk with a day pack on most days where Noel would drop us off, pick us up or both. He would also work out the places to camp and do some shopping on the way.

Beyond Whananaki North Sally and Elly walked with a full pack and no support, other than from lovely people we met on the way.



Monday 29 December 2014: Cape Reinga – Te Pahi Stream (20 plus 3 km)

Sally, Elly and Gerard

After a night at the Waitiki Landing campground Noel dropped us off at Cape Reinga. We walked to the cape for the photo at the signpost and then climbed back up to the start of the trail. It was 7:40am. The TAT website said that it would take us approximately 8 hours to Te Pahi Stream, hence the early start. The weather was beautiful, for now; warm, clear blue skies and a dark blue sea. Noel walked with us to Te Werahi beach, where he turned around as we continued to Twilight beach. However, soon we had already lost the track. We should have looked well before the beach end for marker poles leading up the dunes. We left it too late and after considerable searching spotted a marker pole on top of the dunes, so we had to scramble up through the soft sand to meet it. From here following the track was easy and astonishingly beautiful. The variety of colours in the landscape is incredible. We made good progress and after 3h15m reached Twilight camp (see photo), which has a nice shelter, toilets and fresh water. Several tents dotted the camp. Having had a brief shower on our way (despite the sunny start) and with more drops threatening us, the shelter seemed a good place for an early lunch. We had a lovely conversation with a family (father, son and daughter), who were here for a few days.



From Twilight camp a wide track, almost a 4WD road, leads towards 90-mile beach. However, not long before the beach, road and track split and a few hundred steps took us down to the beach. Rain was threatening us again but as soon as we had put the jacket on it stopped. Here the long beach journey began, although for today it was only 4 km to Te Paki Stream, where we arrived at 2pm, way too early. Noel was going to pick us close to 5pm at the car park, which was only another 3km away. So we had a long break and then made our way up the stream. This is an interesting walk with sand, sand and sand, and 45 minutes later we arrived at the sand-ski resort at the carpark. It was very busy here and everywhere people were making their way up the dunes (slogging) and down again (on their boards). Fortunately Noel arrived early, as he had wanted to walk towards us. A great day, but tiring. We were pleased to have been able to walk with a day pack only.

Tuesday 30 December 2014: Te Paki Stream – the Bluff (3 + 20 km)

Sally, Elly and Gerard

While we were able to walk with a daypack again, the disadvantage of our arrangement was that we also had to walk from the road end to the Te Paki Stream mouth again before we could continue our beach walk, so another 3km extra. Noel accompanied us this time, and returned when we reached the beach. It was 9:15am. 20 km of beach to the Bluff lay ahead of us. To cope with what seems to be a never-ending walkway we decided to walk for one hour and then have a 10-15 minute break. At each break we would get the GPS out and measure our progress. We found that we walked 5-5.5 km in an hour, with which we were very pleased.

The Bluff really sticks out from the beach and it was visible almost from the start; it just took very long for it to come closer. Also the rock with the hole which seems very close at Te Paki Stream was still a 4 km walk from the stream. Distances are very deceiving here. At some stage we started experimenting with walking with our eyes closed, as long as possible. Gerard almost ended up in the sea. We also chose focus points – features on the beach, like a car or a piece of driftwood or an oddly shaped dune – that served as intermediate destinations. This worked well, except in the case of one focus point driving away before we reached it...

We arrived at the Bluff at 2:20pm. Noel had just arrived too. We had intended to camp here but the camp was very primitive and overloaded, with only one toilet. Later we heard that a 16-year old was missing and that the beach south of the Bluff was closed for fishing and swimming, so all tourists had moved to the beach north; hence the packed campground. Noel had been to see the Hukatere camp and recommended to stay there for two nights. On our way to the camp Gerard got a very sore eye, and at a brief stop in Pukenui went to see a nurse at the health centre who could not find a cause. We washed his eye with sterilised water the nurse had given us and the pain went away; it may have been sand in his eye.

Hukatere is lovely. The owner, Gabrielle is a wonderful host; she also has food for sale for TAT walkers; just give her a ring if you wish to stay there. There is a lodge as well as bunks and a very spacious campground.

Wednesday 31 December 2014: the Bluff-Hukatere (30 km)

Sally, Elly and Gerard

The previous day Gerard had walked on his tramping boots which were too sturdy for the terrain and he had developed a good-size blister on the ball of one of his feet. We had covered it up with second skin and today he walked on his walking shoes.

Noel dropped us at the Bluff at 7:45am for the 30 km to Hukatere. Using the same pattern as the day before again we made good progress, but Gerard's feet got worse and worse. Near the end he was hardly able to walk and was very pleased to see the sign indicating the entrance to the campground at 3:15pm. Upon inspection the blister had only increased in size underneath the second skin and there was now also a blister on the other foot.



It was New Year's Eve, and we were waiting for a worthy sunset. Alas, too many clouds. We did meet a family, the father of which was also in the process of walking TAT. He had been doing 4 days each month for 2 years now and was almost in Wellington. This was a good opportunity to get some info from him about the forest walks that were soon to come. Too tired to wait for the new year, we went to bed well before midnight. Tomorrow another walk.

Thursday 1 January 2015: Hukatere – Waipapakauri (17 km)

Sally and Elly

This was the first day we could start our walk straight from the camping ground. Gerard had decided to give his feet a break and did not come, so Sally and Elly went on their own, leaving the men to break up camp. The distance today was only 17 km to Waipapakauri, so we allowed ourselves a sleep in on this first day of 2015. We left Hukatere at 8:45am and, having developed a pattern now for walking the beach, made good progress. It felt easy after having done 30 km the previous day. However, the wind had turned south and now we had a strong headwind. It was still warm though, so the wind was nice in cooling us down a bit. At 1:05pm we arrived at Waipapakauri, which has a large camping ground a few hundred meters inland, but unfortunately no shop or restaurant. It was possible to get takeaways, but we did not make use of this opportunity.

The long afternoon gave us time for a swim in the sea and in the swimming pool.

Friday 2 January 2015: Waipapakauri – Ahipara (13 km)

Sally, Noel and Elly

Only 14 km today, and a rest day ahead of us as well. Gerard's blisters were still very painful, so he offered to drive the car to Ahipara to enable Noel to walk with Sally and Elly for the day. We left the camping ground at 8:30am. There was no breeze and it was very hot. It was great to finally see the end of the beach. Slowly the peninsula increased in size as we came closer. At 11:50am we were there. We had booked a cabin at the holiday park for the two nights; not cheap, but very nice to have a real bed for a change. The holiday park is beautifully situated in a lush park-like environment. Ahipara itself has a shop, and a café/restaurant, called the Gumdiggers Café, which serves beautiful meals and has delicious ice-creams.



The following day was a rest day which we used to do some shopping and to do the laundry, as this was the last chance before Kerikeri to wash our clothes. We also visited the Gumdiggers Museum.

Sunday 4, Monday 5, and Tuesday 6 January 2015: Ahipara-Takahue (35 km)

Sally, Gerard and Elly

The first part is 8.5 km road. Gerard wanted to spare his footsoles as much as possible, so he left it to Sally and Elly to walk this bit; they left at 7:45am. Noel and Gerard met them, with car and packs, at the start of the Herekino Forest track. This was our first section with a full pack, and the beginning of the track was steep. Fortunately there had been very little rain over the last week, so our story about mud in this forest is not as bad as it has been reported by others. However, there were still some serious mud patches, and Noel, who walked with us for the first hour, decided to turn back when the mud became too much. Only 10 minutes after he left us we met the first large kauri – what a treasure. At the Rangiheke Stream, assuming from the descriptions we had read that this was the only stream on the track, we filled up all our bottles so we had enough to stay the night in the forest. The crossing of the stream is 20 meters to the right of where you enter the stream, and a cable is there to help you cross. With the low rainfall we did not need the cable however. Another half hour or so brings you to a beautiful kauri stand. Once we reached the old forest road the walking was easy. At the end of the road a sign points towards Diggers Valley Rd – 4 hours. Approximately half an hour beyond this sign we crossed another stream (and this is the last stream on the track). It was 2:45pm. Having a rest here, we noticed a space where people had camped before us, and decided to set up camp. We could only just fit our two-person tent in, and put the one person tent on the track, but it worked. It was a lovely spot, with water! Coordinates are E162272/N610604.



When we went to bed, Elly discovered a tick on her arm. Gerard managed to remove it, but during the night she got feverish and she was unable to keep her breakfast down in the morning, so she started walking without food. It wasn't until later that she managed to eat dry biscuits.

Nevertheless, the second day was as nice as the first one. We left at 8:45am. After only 200 meters from our camp (and from the stream) we found the two derelict logging cabins, which have a decent-sized space to camp next to them, so this would have been another option. Then the climb to the top followed. There is a grassy space at the top, and cell phone coverage, but no views whatsoever, which was slightly disappointing. There is no water either. From here it took us 1h15m to get to Diggers Valley Road. The walk from here to Waiotehue Road was easy but it was very hot.

After turning off Diggers Valley Road it is wise to make sure you take the right roads through the forestry area. If it had not been for Noel coming to meet us we would have taken the wrong road; there was no TAT signage. We arrived at 3pm at Waiotehue Road. Sally and Elly continued to walk to Takahue which was another 40 minutes away, but Gerard jumped in the car with Noel and the packs to set up camp in Takahue. In Takahue you can camp at the old school grounds, which is now a community marae. There are toilets and showers. We were lucky, because a forestry worker group was staying as well, so there were even hot showers. Other than that there are no supplies in Takahue.



It wasn't until we had arrived at Takahue and showered that we realised we had actually planned to walk to the start of the Mangamuka track, which was another 2.5 km away. However, with Elly still feeling not too well we decided to stay in Takahue for a day. This enabled Elly to get some strong painkillers for the headache she had developed (we were so lucky having the car), Elly and Sally to walk the 2.5km, and for all of us to do a day trip to Rawene and have a look around there.

Wednesday 7 January 2015: Takahue-Makene Road (17.5 km)

Sally, Gerard and Elly

Our initial plan had been to take two days to walk from Takahue to Mangamuka Bridge. However, knowing there would be no water on the way, and not knowing how to carry enough water for two days with the heat (it was still well over 25 degrees each day), we changed plans and decided to walk Raetea Forest in a day, with a pick up by Noel at Makene Road. The following day we could then be dropped off at Makene and do the road walk for as far as we could.

At 7:45am we started at the Mangamuka track sign. From here it is a steady uphill over the old road to Broadwood. Once at the saddle the real forest track began. A good climb took us to the first high point at 580 meters. This took 1.5 hours. Raetea summit is visible from here, as well as the ridge to follow. It took us another two hours with a long hard climb near the end to get to the summit. It is important to note here that the summit of Raetea is not on the TAT. Once you reach a sign pointing to go left to Mangamuka Gorge (which is also the direction for TAT), the track to the summit goes right. The description from the TAT book and website raised the impression with us, however, that the trail went over the summit, as they talk about views opening up (which is only on the actual summit) and a grassy clearing and transmission tower. We started searching for the continuation of

the trail beyond the tower, but could not find any markers. So we went back and discovered that the sign pointed us in the right direction. The views from the summit are fantastic however, all the way to the Hokianga harbour if you're lucky, so definitely worth the five-minute detour.

From the summit the trail continues via multiple muddy patches. We were lucky having had no rain for a while now which made the patches very manageable. For people seeking a place to camp, there are a couple of small tent sites at the summit of 727.

We also found that the trail does not align with the TAT map from the website. The map suggests that the trail does not go over the various tops that the description on the website mentions, but it does indeed, which means quite a few ups and downs before you finally get to a long wide almost flat track, which is still at approx. 400 meters altitude however. This track is very muddy in places, but is otherwise easy walking. Finally, when you start seeing a fence on one side of the track you are nearing farmland which takes you down to Makene Road. When we came out of the forest we saw Noel walking towards us. He warned us about a smelly dead horse on the track; it was disgusting indeed.

At 4:30pm we reached Makene Road. It had been a long day, but we were very pleased to have done this forest in a day. There is indeed no water and we would have been very thirsty.

Noel drove us to Mangamuka Bridge where there is a shop with good supplies, ice cream, take aways, good coffees, and even nail polish if your feet need a pamper. They also helped us with finding a place to camp, and pointed us to some nice swimming holes (if you have transport).

Thursday 8 January 2015: Makene Road-Kauri Pa Road (18 km)

Sally and Elly

Noel dropped us off where we had finished the previous day and without pack we walked to Mangamuka Bridge to have a coffee with the guys. Gerard was still cautious with his feet, and as this was a whole day of road, he thought it better to rest and use the day to do some work. After coffee we carried on towards Omahuta forest. On the way there we were warned by a lady to be very careful as logging trucks come down the road and they drive very fast. We were not sure how far we would be able to walk so that Noel could still pick us up. We had agreed on a pick-up point, but found that the road is very good all the way to the Kauri Sanctuary. We suggested that Sally and Elly continued to walk while Noel returned to camp to pick up Gerard so we could all go and have a look at the sanctuary. Sally and Elly managed to get to 2 km before the Kauri Pa Road turnoff when the guys caught up with us. That was 18 km out of the way today; great! The Sanctuary is impressive, but the results from the kauri dieback disease are very visible. The sanctuary is about a km away from the track, but still worth a visit if you are staying at the Apple Tree camp. This camp is 500 m from the TAT; follow the road to the sanctuary and take a grassy track sharp left (there is no signage). You will first see the toilet left and the water tank to the right. The camp is at the end of the track. It is very small and not well maintained; the water tank has some water, but there is also a stream nearby which may be safer. The toilet is quite old too.

After the visit we returned to our camp.

Friday 9-Saturday 10 January: Kauri Pa Road-Puketi Forest Headquarters (26 km)

Sally, Gerard and Elly

These two days were a highlight of our walk. Starting where we had finished the previous day, 2 km before the Kauri Pa Rd turn-off, we walked, with full pack this time, via the easy tracks down to the Mangapukahukahu Stream. It was a lovely stream walk, easy with the water levels very low. However, we still got wet boots and feet, but that was to be expected. When we reached the confluence with the Waipapa river we noticed a not very obvious marker on a track going up on the right. This track takes you over a bluff so you can cross without getting too wet. The crossing was still knee-deep however, despite the low water levels.

Across the Waipapa, a track has been cut all the way to the start of the Puketea Ridge track, so no further river crossings are needed until just before you go up the ridge track. The new track is still very difficult to walk however, and afterwards we thought it might have been easier to go through the river bed. The forest is amazing here, with a real subtropical flavour. We found several dead possums hanging out of traps. Just before the crossing of Puketea Stream a large sign provides all the tramping options from here. The track takes you into Puketi Forest and to a campsite with space for two small tents just 30 meters up the track. This was our spot for the night. It was beautiful. Puketi Forest is kauris, many of them. It was an absolute privilege to be able to camp among these magnificent trees and to see them small, medium and large. Seeing this forest gives hope for the future of kauris, however difficult the eradication of the dieback disease may be. There is also a great swimming hole in Puketea Stream which was very welcome on this hot day.



After a great night's sleep in the forest we started our steady climb up Puketea Ridge. It is a good track and the kauri are worth the climb. It took us two hours to the junction with the Walnut Track and the Pirau Ridge track. The last part before the junction again is stunning with many impressive kauri on show. The Pirau Ridge track is a long two-hour slog on the road to the Puketi Headquarters. Going through the gate at the end of the road you see a large sign. If you follow the 'no access' direction you will soon see an arrow pointing to the camping ground. There are lots of spaces here.

Noel was already here. He had managed to book the hut for us: a 20 bunk hut with fridge, cooking gear, etc, just for the four of us. And this also included hot showers! What an unexpected luxury. With some energy to spare we walked the nature trail – worth it! And don't forget to clean your boots; there is cleaning equipment at the registration shelter.

Sunday 11 January: Puketi Forest Headquarters – Kerikeri (25 km)

Sally, Gerard and Elly

A long day ahead of us, we left at 8am on our way to Kerikeri. Noel used the opportunity to do another kauri walk in the Puketi Forest before driving to Kerikeri.

What a difference in scenery compared to the previous week! The first few kms were on the road, and then we saw the very first real Te Araroa sign, explaining the way to the Stone Store. We crossed the adjacent stile onto farmland but went the wrong way as we did not see the next marker. It happened to be along the fence line down at a second stile. Then the track led to the right through the centre of the paddock to the next marker. From here, it was reasonably easy to follow the markers as long as we took note of the direction in which they pointed.

This section of TAT is great in its variety of terrain. First the paddocks, then 5km of road (least exciting, but the only road on this section), more paddocks, great views, a track along a stream, a beautiful park-like track with enormous totaras along the Kerikeri River, and finally the Kerikeri Track proper, including waterfall vistas.



The end of this section is worth it too: the oldest stone building in NZ, the Stone Store. We arrived at 3:30pm and were just in time to buy an ice cream from the café next door to the Stone Store. Noel had set up camp at the Kerikeri Holiday Park which is 2.7 km from the Stone Store (follow Kerikeri Rd for 2.4 km then turn right into Aranga Rd). We treated ourselves to a beautiful dinner at the Black Olive just 300 meters from the camp ground, to celebrate reaching the 200 (actually 222) km mark.

Before going to the camp we looked for how to continue our walk from here as we could not find any signs. We found that we had to go up Kerikeri Road for 50 meters and then turn left onto a carpark. At the end of the carpark is a TAT marker.

Monday 12 January: Rest day in Kerikeri

We drove the loop road, with wonderful views, from Kerikeri to Matauri Bay where we visited the Samuel Marsden memorial church and graveyard. We then drove on Te Ngaere Bay where we had a swim and then visited the museum at Kaeo and had an icecream across the road – both very worthwhile.

Tuesday 13 January: Kerikeri to Opua Ferry (27 km)

Sally, Gerard and Elly

We left at 7.30 am and managed to go around in a big circle back to where we started! So to avoid this go straight from the carpark (don't divert to the pa site unless you want to look at the view), go left over the small footbridge and keep following the track until you hit Pa Road. Follow this road until you meet the Kerikeri Inlet Road. Go left for approximately 3 kms until you see a gate with the Te Araroa sign on your right. This takes you into the Waitangi Forest which is all forest road. It is easy walking but a bit monotonous. However the TAT memorial celebrating the opening of the first leg of the trail is worth a photo. Continuing past this memorial you reach a gate. If you go through this gate and then left, a track takes you to Mt Bledisloe summit, with a great view over Waitangi, Paihia and Russell. You need to retrace your steps on the track to the road again, and turn left to Waitangi. There are great views on the way. There is no signage but the description in the book and website is clear. Once at Waitangi, which was at 11:30 in the morning, we rang Noel to meet us at the ferry terminal in Paihia at noon, to have a coffee together. As we had a lot of time left in the day, we decided to continue on to Opua. This was a good decision. The TAT between Kerikeri and Paihia we found a bit disappointing, but the 6 km from Paihia to Opua was absolutely superb with its rocky coastline, bushtrack and mangrove boardwalk. Half way along this track we passed the Beachside holiday campground on which we would be staying. Noel came to greet us on the opua side of the track. We arrived around 3 pm at Opua Ferry. There is a shop here. Noel drove us back to the Beachside camp which has good facilities and runs down to the beach. If you are swimming make sure you swim at high tide as underfoot was very muddy at low tide.

Wednesday 14 January: Opua Ferry to Oakura turn off (11 km via 'watertaxi' plus 20.5 km)

Sally, Gerard and Elly

We took the car ferry and then Noel drove us to Waikare where we started walking at 8.40 am; this was our interpretation of the watertaxi. It is an easy gravel road walk, going over into a wide bush track and then to the river. The first 1.5 km of the river walk are tracks with river crossings. The next 2 km however is pure river wading and shoal hopping but not too many rocks. The river was between sole and knee deep, and really beautiful. Then tracks interchanged with river crossings take over again for another 0.5 km before you leave the river altogether. Then the track takes you to a sign, pointing left past a nice DOC shelter (good camping spot, water is 50m further along the track).



A long slow climb up and down again leads to Russell Rd. The walking on the road was hard, particularly in the heat. We arrived at 3.05 pm at the Oakura Rd turn-off where Noel picked us up, fortunately, because we weren't really looking forward to another 3km via the road to the Whangururu South Beach campground.

Thursday 15 January: Oakura turn-off - Whananaki North (17 km)

Sally, Gerard and Elly

We started from the corner of Oakura and Russell Roads at 7.35 am with a long walk on the road. While we were having a rest on the corner of Russell and Webb Roads in Helena Bay we met a lovely couple who invited us for a coffee at their holiday home. Not only did they give us a real coffee, they also gave us a huge plum and a piece of Christmas cake each! What a treat. We left refreshed and followed the road which climbed steadily up for some time. We looked back from time to time on the lovely views over the countryside. At the top we checked our GPS and found that we had climbed 250 meters! We easily found the turn-off to Morepork track, which is easy walking and beautiful. The description stated that there are chances of getting lost but we found the track to be very well-marked. There is a nasty climb further on the track, after you have crossed the little streams, but then the descent to Whananaki North Road begins. Noel picked us up at the road, and after having loaded our packs into the car we walked the remaining part of the trail to the estuary and the longest footbridge in the Southern hemisphere. We stayed at the Whananaki School which has modest facilities and cheap camping in school holidays and weekends. It is run by volunteers as a fund raiser for the school. The Whananaki Holiday Camp is nextdoor. There is a shop here as well as a café with great coffees.

Friday 16 and Saturday 17 January: Rest days in North Whananaki

Elly and Gerard did a snorkelling trip to the Poor Knights Islands from Tutukaka while Sally and Noel swam at Matapouri Beach and walked up to the lighthouse. There were amazing views from here. They, and some other people who had also walked up to the lighthouse, waved frantically as Elly and Gerard's boat passed our point. We also used this day to do some washing.

On the second rest day we walked to Whananaki South, we had a swim and walked back alongside the estuary which had a large colony of breeding and quite aggressive oystercatchers. The wonderful volunteers running the camp gave us some pipi fritters and also encouraged some of us to taste kina for the first time.

Gerard and Noel were going home the following day so we needed some time to repack and reorganise. Full packs and tent for Sally and Elly from here onwards.

Sunday 18 January: Whananaki North - Woolley's Bay (10 km)

Sally and Elly only from now on.

Easy day today. We packed up and had a lovely coffee at the Whananaki North shop before we started. Finally on our way we realised that the men had taken all sunscreen with them so we had to turn back to buy some at the shop.

It was a beautiful walk with loads of wonderful views. We stopped at the Havana Cabana Café in Sandy Bay and had a cold refreshing alcohol-free pina colada while listening to Cuban music in an idyllic setting. If you have time and they are open we recommend you call in here. It was Sunday and there had been a church service at the café before we arrived; people who had attended the service stayed on for free coffee etc.



We walked on to a holiday home owned by friends of Elly's. Their beautiful house looks down on Woolley Bay's. We were driven to Whale Bay for an afternoon swim and Elly's friend talked to us about the different trees and their history on the way down to the bay – Puriri, Rata, Karaka, Tairere. Whale Bay is lined with old pohutukawas. The clear sea got deep quickly and was perfect for swimming. We had our first home cooked meal in many weeks – delicious.

Monday 19 January: Woolley's Bay - Ngunguru Ford Rd (27 km plus a 1 km detour)

With no campground in Ngunguru and no vacancy in Sam's Bush Retreat, Elly's friend offered to pick us up so we could stay another night at Woolley's Bay. This meant we could walk with a day pack only and cover a large part of the 18 km Ngunguru connection around the estuary without having to carry the heavy pack. We left at 7.50 am from Woolley's Bay via the beach and then Matapouri

headlands track. If you have time and energy we strongly recommend this 1 km detour. Much more interesting than walking to Matapouri via the road.

The Matapouri bush track was beautiful and varied. It was encouraging to see how some private land owners cherish nature and allow it to flourish on their property. Some 20 minutes before hitting the road again Tane Moana is worth a photo – magnificent.



In Ngunguru is a café and a shop, so a good place for at least a coffee, but also for supplies, as the next opportunity is either Pataua (which has a tiny shop during the busy season over summer) or Ruakaka past Marsden Point. We had a coffee and ate our lunch along the estuary. We then started the long road walk. The Riverland lodge is just over 30 minutes from the shop along the trail. It also appears to offer camping, which we did not know. This road is very busy but the scenery is nice. We arrived at the Ngunguru Ford Road turn at 4 pm where Elly's friend picked us up. We were pleased to have been able to cover so much of the road part.

Tuesday 20 January: Ngunguru Ford Rd - Pataua South (21 km)

Elly's friend dropped us off at Ngunguru Ford Road. We started at 8.10 am and walked for 45 minutes to Mackerel Forest. An easy walk on forestry road first and then through lots of long (overgrown to over our heads) toetoe and flax which led to a big climb up to the road. It took us 1 hr 10 minutes. It was a very hot, long 14kms on road to Pataua Treasure Island camp. We arrived at 2.20 pm, had a swim at another lovely beach and takeaways from the shop at the camping ground.

Wednesday 21 January: Pataua South - Ocean Beach (18 km)

We didn't leave until 1.00 pm because of the tide. Low tide was not until 3pm. The walk to the estuary was easy but we found the walk along the estuary difficult at times through and around mangrove swamp. There were some directions at the start of the estuary to look out for white poles, but it was very unclear which ones were the ones to follow. We heard, but didn't see, someone shout to us to carry straight on across from where we were (thank you!). We carried on and finally crossed where there was one pole in the middle of the estuary; halfway we could see white posts on the other side and there we saw TAT markers again. The trail was straight forward after that

including the trail over Kauri Mountain which we suspect had recently had more steps and loads of orange markers added. The sole on one of Sally's boots had started flapping wildly.



We then walked a 6 kms along the beach. The tide was coming in and we could no longer walk around the final rock formation to get to Ocean Beach settlement. Instead we decided to climb over which was a scary exercise. There wasn't a camping ground here. We'd tried ringing a B and B a few times but got no answer. In the end we camped on the grassy overflow car park which has two toilets and a water tank but no drinking water. Luckily we had our steripen (which we used a few times before this when we weren't sure about the state of the water), which purified the water, but the taste was very metallic. Good for soup though. The sole of Sally's boot was just hanging on. A kind man who was camping as well gave her some duct tape. We decided we'd wait until morning when the boot was dry to wrap the sole and boot.

We arrived around 6.30pm. It felt like a very long and quite difficult day. Pleased to finally get into the tent.

Thursday 22 January: Ocean Beach - Ruakaka (10 km)

We were woken at 1.30 am by a policeman. This was pretty scary as we weren't supposed to be camping where we were. However he was looking for a Fleur as they'd picked up an American guy who was out of it and they were trying to find where he'd come from.

We now know that duct tape doesn't work on wet boots so we decided to walk/hitch to Whangarei to buy new boots. This meant we missed a lovely part of the trail from Ocean Beach through Peach Cove (we hope to go back and do this before we complete the Auckland part of TAT). We walked for about 5kms, got two rides and caught a bus into Whangarei. We bought a new pair of boots from Rebel Sports and then the lovely Lorna (who we had met earlier doing the TAT with her three daughters) drove us to Marsden Point so we could continue the trail. This also saved us finding a water taxi to get across the water.

It was low tide which made walking on the beach easy when we left from Marsden Point at 2.15 pm. We tried the pipeline track for a short while for a change from the beach but found it hard going in the soft sand so returned to the beach. When we had the Ruakaka campground in sight we crossed

the estuary at low tide but found it 'undies' deep. Sally did not want to get her new boots wet, so up to her middle in the water she held the boots high while crossing. We think we should have gone a bit further inland for an easier crossing.



The campground gave us a discount price of \$15 pp including showers because we were trampers.

We arrived at 4.45 pm.

Friday 23 January: Ruakaka - Waipu Cove (17 km)

We left Ruakaka at 7.30 am and arrived at Waipu Cove at 1.30 pm. The tide was coming in and getting closer and closer; we were hoping to get to Tip Road before it became impossible to walk on the beach. But it took us only 1.5 hours and we had plenty of time left. It was a road walk to Waipu where there are plenty of shops. After a coffee we enquired how we could get from Mangawhai Heads (our intended destination the following day) to the nearest Intercity bus stop. We were told that this would be very difficult. This made us decide to take the bus the following day from Waipu, which has a bus stop itself, as well as a ticket office in the post shop.

We then walked to Waipu Cove and found a modern, quiet campground with cottages only five minutes past the Cullen Road turn-off on the left. It had a Huckleberry Finn raft across a small stream to another beautiful beach. The camp people were not allowed to build a bridge because it crosses a wild life reserve. After a swim we walked for 10 minutes to Waipu café which had great coffee and food. The large camping ground in Waipu Cove appeared very crowded.

This was the end of our TAT for this year. Hopefully to be continued...

