

Reflections on Working Weekend 21 on Hauturu

Off Norma Jean into the runabout and riding a crest we were delivered into the cradle, winched to the boathouse and unloaded dry.

Horror stories of wet landings had become an adventurous challenge rather than a deterrent. But prepared for the worst, we were treated to the best (landing).

Not far out from Sandspit an easterly had delivered a swell and a few white-horses. Leader Lyn reckoned the wind was 15-18 knots, not uncomfortable and weathered well by the launch and the skilful experience of the skipper. About 40 minutes out LBI vanished, buried in grey misty rain; the wind caught loose items and salt spray showered the transom. All jolly good stuff, we reckoned.

After quarantine on landing, we crossed a handsome sturdy bridge and passed what must be the knurliest Puriri tree in the world, then around to the bunkhouse to bag a bunk. Brian and Sarah choosing (separately) to sleep on sofas in the lounge.

Lyn's customary chocolate cake with lunch, a check-out by local kaka Ratbag, and over to the boulder beach to pick up rubbish. And then the rain came and the temperature dropped and the wind with its chill froze. But the rubbish got collected and assembled in two great caches. All the normal jetsam and some flotsam, plastic and rubbish, rope and tackle, rusty metal and netting. Garry found something too smelly to put in the rucksack so dragged it along behind. He reckoned also it was just as well his mum was not there to swoon over the driftwood.

While we were drying out and warming up around a fire thoughtfully prepared and stoked by a resident weeder, the barbecue was trundled around by ranger Liz who cooked to order with skill and panache items ranging from hamburgers to a 'medium rare'.

Dave dispensed generous amounts of a smooth Chilean red and ramped-up the gathering weaving a riveting tale of the grape variety having a French connection severed during the mid-1800s when mildews almost destroyed that wine industry. Sheryl and Neil, so experienced in Forest and Bird matters, produced some of the deliciously attractive salads to accompany other dishes. Mark had a tale of being appointed to a position in a senior school that doesn't exist. (Looks like Albany students have now found temporary accommodation.) Shane - I never got around to asking him if he would recommend, as an adviser, a career of weeding on LBI.

Later we went out on a night time quest for wildlife that, being accustomed to their place, did the sensible thing and stayed in bush hideaways while the mainland intruders sloshed about getting wet and cold. And so to bed to be woken by the smoke alarm. Damn. Brian got up and found no obvious smoke but the normal hut stuffiness.

Open the doors and the alarm stopped. Good. Alarm again - but where is the thing? Groping in the dark he reckoned it was best to remove the battery. Then, more sweet dreams.

Sunday dawned calm and dank. But there were good opportunities to continue with the beach clean-up and do a circuit up Thumb Track. A great combination of ancient flora and spring birdlife, a good walk and a helpful commentary from leader Lyn. Shane talked us through the life of an old Tuatara and the incubators of the young ones. For me, the writer, a highlight was seeing a flock of grazing Kereru.

Now Norma Jean was riding anchor. Hine Moana slid down the rails and as the stern caught a swell, we were on our return. From a great sunny afternoon to the chill wind at Sandspit. A memorable weekend.

Brian Dorrington