

**Doubtful<sup>2</sup>**  
**=**  
**Likely**

**A 21 day small boat trip in  
Fiordland**

**Troy Watson**

For Richard, J.V., and Toine,

*We see the world through different eyes;  
Yet for a short time, we saw through one.*



### **Doubtful<sup>2</sup> = Likely**

Destination Fiordland. Two very small inflatable boats, 400 litres of fuel and 21 days. Richard was packed 10 days beforehand with every item on his list double ticked and carefully stored in colour coded appropriately sized drybags. March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2022, 1<sup>st</sup> day of trip - I wasn't – much to his justified annoyance. Eight hours later I had no ticks, a semblance of packing and we had completed the food and fuel shop. Fuel was easy, four hundred litres of fuel, mixed 50:1, for the outboard engines in a variety of 10 and 20 L jerry cans. Two hundred litres to take with us. Two hundred litres hidden in a dog kennel to be brought in, via float plane, in a week with JV and Toine. Food was harder, one week to keep the boats light or three weeks in case the plane didn't arrive. We didn't make a clear decision, so we had plenty of food for a week and a dubious amount for three. After a heated debate the glass jar of sauerkraut was banned but the pickle snuck around and stowed away under an innocent unsuspecting bag of rice.



*You had better take some fuel*

We planned on boating across Lake Manapouri, heading to Doubtful Sound and up the coast to Charles and Caswell Sound, ostensibly to look for canyons. We had a lot of stuff: canyoning, spearfishing, hunting, camping, boats and associated paraphernalia and repair kits. We had two small boats: Richard's, a 4.2 m retired surf-life-saving orange beast with a 30 h.p. outboard; and a 4.2 m Takacat (catamaran), with a 15 h.p. outboard, that was kindly lent to us by our friend Marnix.

Reaching Supply Bay (the start of our Manapouri leg) we were only seven hours behind schedule and increasingly uncertain as to whether we could squeeze all the important gear into the boats, including the unknown pickle – in a very un squeezable jar.

Nothing fills the lender of boats with confidence more than a phone call by the borrowers asking how to inflate, put together and drive the said boat before heading out to the Southern Ocean. At least we were starting on a lake. It was also getting dark. Everything seemed to fit, the majority in the orange boat, clearly Richard knew what he was doing. He also knew how to drive a boat. The same could not be said for me. Covid had delayed JV and Toine and so now I was driving, it seemed too audacious to say skippering.

Doing some slow ponderous mental and finger aided arithmetic as we puttered into the twilight, I realised that it had been at least 10 years since I had used an outboard. I patted my PLB, checked the radio and rubbed the drysuit seals for luck, then drove in circles, accidentally. The lake was pleasantly calm, Richard was clearly faster with his 30 h.p., but kindly waited. As we slid up the lake the stress of the rest of the world slightly eased – it would be fully gone in two or three days. We arrived at West Arm, the location of the Manapouri power station and the start, or end, of the Wilmot Pass road on dark.

There were rumours of a red meister truck that we could borrow, we weren't quite sure where it was, and I thought the keys were somewhere that they weren't. However, amidst much astonishment, we had loaded the truck with two fully inflated boats, one perpendicular to the tray and a hazard to cyclists or passing deer and another sticking above the roof and a hazard to low flying aircraft or moths. An hour or so later, with no vehicles and only 107 possums passed, we were in Deep Cove – the start of Doubtful Sound and salt water. Boats were unloaded, unwieldy engines were wrestled to a post and a mountain of gear was left at the boat ramp, it was 11 p.m.. Back over the road, a small stop for a drink at a stream, 30 more possums, a slight wrong turn (on a road with only one other hidden small turning option) and the truck was back. A romantic roast chicken dinner for two, in the visitor centre with lights, running water and power; then roll out the mats, 1:30 a.m., and set the alarm for seven.



*Taking the boats over Wilmot Pass*

Boooooom grrhmoom, raw noise and bright lights, the visitor centre is an interrogation centre. It was 6:30 a.m. and the lights and heaters had just automatically roared into being. After heart rates slowed, we dreadingly looked at each other and proceeded to get up. Eve had kindly organised a lift over the hill for us with the bus driver. A private tour on a 50-seater bus, and we were shortly back at Deep Cove trying to impress some tourists with our ambitious boating and canyoning plans. We succeeded in impressing them, although talk is cheap, and actions and a lack of experience, and possibly ability, were ahead of us.

We blasted out to Dea's Cove, flying past places that had taken quite-a-while-to-get-to in sea kayaks two years ago. Rich said something like, "It's so flat, I reckon we can make it all the way to Charles today". I silently agreed and we dropped 40 L of fuel at Dea's hut and set off. Three minutes later the headwind and chop stopped us.

Something orange was coming towards us; it was a bit uncertain as to what it was. It turned into a double and single foldable kayakers sailing proudly. They pulled up beside us and confirmed that it was indeed very windy and that it was also very windy outside of the sound. It was 11 a.m. and the day-breeze said, "No". They had flown into Caswell and paddled to Charles, Nancy, and then Doubtful, a 7-day trip. It looked like fun and we felt like sea-bogans.

We spent the rest of the day mucking around at Dea's and watched a tuna mass strand a hundred or so 20 cm bait fish as they jumped onto land and died to avoid being eaten. Then we worried about tomorrow's forecast and what worse things that could happen at sea might be. Up around 6:45 a.m. and boats packed by 8 – I am not sure why it took so long - no breakfast just a one-minute walk/carry and drive. In grey light with slight apprehension and nervous anticipation we headed for the open sea. I had given more gear to Richard and so the boat was handling better – although I had nowhere near Richard's speed, or possibly even his 6-hour style.

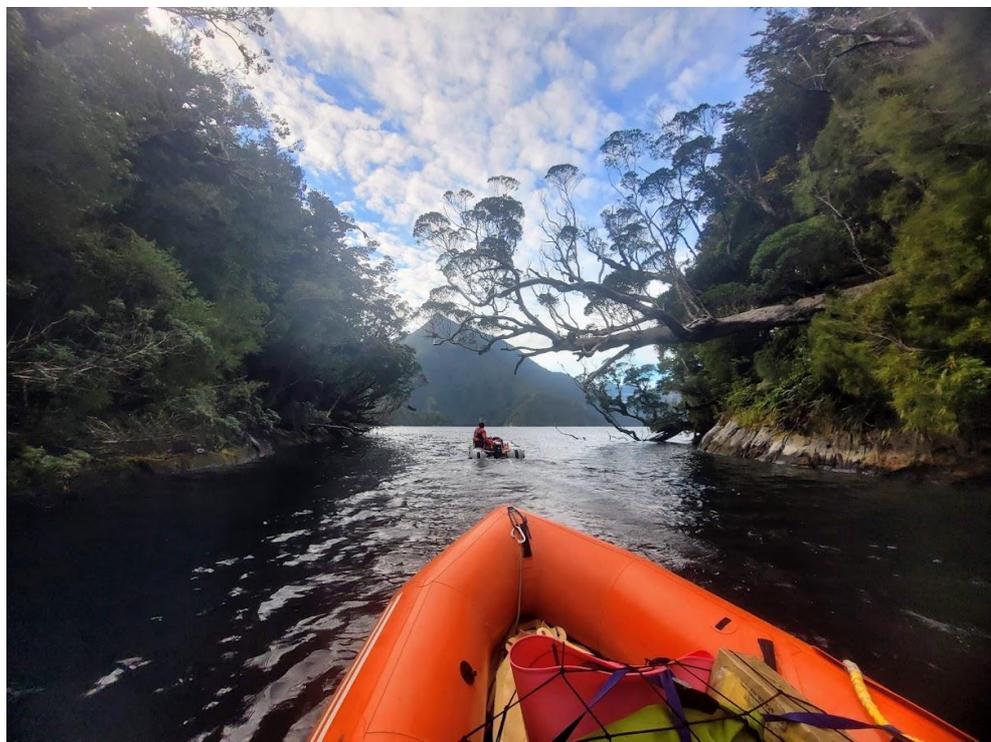


Gently easing out of the sound and we were into a glassy 4 m, long period SW swell. The nerves started to ease and the albatross and petrel soared. The coastline was very impressive and we were exceedingly glad for the good forecast. We passed Nancy Sound and then we were turning into Charles. This had been our objective two years ago and the weather and our ability had not allowed us to leave Doubtful. It was with a large amount of satisfaction and wide eyes that we cruised up Charles

Sound. We checked out some canyons and campsites in Emillius arm, and then continued up the Irene River. We met Andy who was on his launch for three months hunting and diving and then we continued down Gold Arm. Richard found an amazing camp spot, with a few rusty pipes in-residence. Flat ground with scenic views and drinking water was also a positive, although sun wasn't really an option. The setters-up-of-camp-spots-in-Fiordland had must-not-receive-sun at the top of the priority list – avant garde with respect to the growing ozone hole. We were camped on the shore of a marine reserve and so motored to Eleanor Island to catch crays and fish for dinner.

Having not free-dived in Fiordland for a while, it was with eagerness and slight nervousness that I flopped into the water - it generally takes me a dive or two to relax. The visibility was amazing, three months of no rain and calm seas, and the layer of freshwater floating on the surface was minimal and not very dark. The drop-off was impressive, a steep wall disappearing into the stygian gloom. Following it down ghostly white "black" corals loomed and it was amongst these in the cracks that numerous crays lounged. A few dives later and we had crays but no fish. A large blue moki appeared which I shot; blood was in the water. Pulling it to the surface it tangled in seaweed. I left the line and headed to the surface for a breath. Seven metres down having just ickyed the fish a massive speeding grey body appeared in the corner of my left eye, at the same time as a small underwater scream. At the last second some large dolphins swerved and kept on their merry way. Richard swam up to excitedly tell me about dolphins and also helped me sort the fish. Back to camp, set up the tents and settle in for stars, our first night of crays and fish as well as the satisfaction of having made it and being in a very special place.

The gentle patter of rain on the tent in the morning was a small army of sandflies, attempting to welcome us personally to Fiordland. The dolphins cruised past camp doing tricks and chasing fish while boil-ups were almost continuous and would be for the rest of the trip. As the weather window was still good, we decided to check out the stream/waterfall/canyon behind camp.





We bashed up the true-left of the stream to the 300m contour, where it flattened out. The forest and views were amazing and we strolled upstream in our polypro, having left the gear at the start of the technical section. We were a rather comical sight to the jittering fantails. Back down to the start and the stream and views were beautiful. The canyon was not as boxed-in/U shaped as we were hoping. But the scenery was spectacular. I only lowered Richard once head-first down a waterfall, much to his a/be-musement. We arrived at the camp pool around 5.30 p.m. and decided to grab a cray from the island. Diving until 7 p.m. when it started to get darker and back to watch the bioluminescence lap against the camp shore.

Being sea-bogans we thought we had better go and explore the sound a bit more and collect a bit of seafood and firewood. The fish boil-ups were omnipresent, and dolphins were partying. We ended up at a stunning beach on the true left of the sound part way out. The water was surprisingly shallow, clear and warm while the fish, crays, paua, firewood and sandflies were plentiful.

Diving in Fiordland can be a little different as a layer of freshwater often sits on top of the saltwater. This fresh layer can be anywhere from a few centimetres to several metres, depending on the last rain, location and tide. The freshwater is stained brown with tannins and is colder, meaning you can't see very well until you have dived through, and sometimes shiver on the surface.

Patterns swirl where the two layers meet. Floating in the low vis surface waters is generally relaxing but at times can be uncomfortable, especially if there is a shark about. It also cuts down light, allowing for things that are generally only found quite deep to be near the surface, such as black coral – which is actually white. Normally black coral is found on continental slopes below 50 m



*The view from camp.*

*Looking towards the Windward river in Charles Sound, Fiordland, at sunset*

depth. However, in the Sounds you can often find it at low tide below three metres. The drop-offs can also be intense and vertigo-inducing as you peer over an edge or down a wall to eternity. These undersea walls are continuations of the vertical ones above, and can quickly descend to over 100 m.. The continental shelf is just off the mouth of the Sounds, the marine life is astounding, add to it that you are in a relatively remote place and the diving is amazing. Back at camp that evening we both agreed that a good day in Fiordland was hard to beat.

A day for fools, so we were suitably justified wandering in circles, looking for deer to shoot – April 1<sup>st</sup>. Yet to walk around in circles in a swamp is not straight forward. We had boated, climbed a hill, puffed, skirted a gorge and tripped-up up some boulder gardens. All the while with our noses to the ground, eyes incoherently circling and discussing the vagaries of bent twigs and scat. It was only natural that we saw nothing. So, we went and had afternoon-tea by the Windward River and inspected a potential side canyon. Falling through the steep bush and talking loudly through the swamp I stepped onto a wobbly log and paused. Unexpected pausing can often have dire consequences. Simultaneously, Richard jumped onto the log and a miffed stag ran 25 m.. The log wobbled, the break-down-open-sight-single-shot .308 boomed and an unlucky stag dropped. I fumbled to reload as I ran through the bush and it stumbled up. Reloaded, a primal look of fear in the collapsed stag's eyes, a gurgling noise due to a bullet that had smashed its shoulder and lungs, then a knife cutting into its jugular and blood. Butchering, and we left with the back legs and steaks. The scrubby 6-point head remained. Vacuum packed in the supermarket is certainly different.

It was dusk so we waded down the Windward River, as it seemed a faster way to the boat. Chest deep in water with blood leaking from the pack I hoped the eels weren't hungry. We decided to pass the short gorge on the true left (TL) as it avoided climbing the hill. We finished at a steep exposed rock bank above the Sound. We left the gear, jumped and swam to find the boat.



Swimming and wading around a point, we had to smile as the boat was somewhat stuck in the air. The outgoing tide had left the nose in a tree and the stern in the mud. Dusk was nearing darkness as we sank in the mud and dragged the boat to the water, collected the gear and headed towards camp. The stars twinkled in the cold clear evening, as the stags began to roar, and two content people splashed in bioluminescence, busy anchoring and unpacking a boat.

April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2022, a day of 2's, for two fools? Most things start well and innocently. How they end is often unplanned.

The Plan: JV and Toine would fly in via float plane that evening. We would meet them and gift the pilot, a friend, some kai moana. The four of us would then sit by the fire enjoying the solitude.



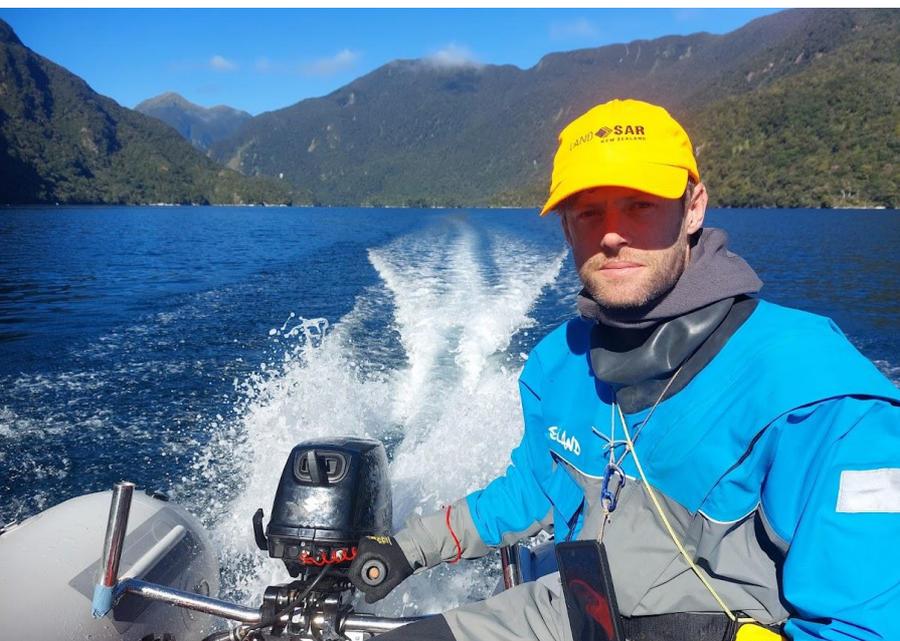
*JV, Box, Troy and Plane*

Reality: That morning Richard and I were both excited, we had been in a week, things were going well, and we were looking forward to catching up with JV and Toine. We had breakfast, prepped camp a bit and set off for a wall dive, TL halfway out to mouth. Putting on wet wetsuits each morning was a rapid process mainly since our naked bodies were swarmed by hundreds of females, and it

all got a bit too much. An unusual experience for most of us – not however for one of the group of four. Female sandflies love nudity more than the average “insert noun” and use blood to get enough energy to lay eggs, the males feed on plant sap.

Diving at the wall was exceptionally deep, clear and warm (thanks to a marine heatwave). The black corals were abundant and a shag and multiple fish decided to swim beside us. By this stage we could hold our breaths for over a minute and get to around 20 m in depth. With such clear vis you could often get distracted looking at corals, crays, fish, shellfish, jellyfish, starfish, and the last 5 m. of the ascent could feel quite long as tranquil bubbles rose around you. After the wall dive, we headed to the shallow “firewood” beach for spearfishing and wood. Several fish and crays later it was 3.30 p.m. and we were sitting on the beach ready for lunch. Pulling out the lunch bag and Inreach we got a message from JV and Toine, “Leaving now, be in soon”, that was sent 30 minutes ago. Scrap lunch, load the boat with wood and go, expecting a plane to buzz us all the way back to camp. Unload wood. Prep second boat for shuttle and finally a quick snack at 4.30 p.m., as the floatplane roared into land, maybe water in this case? There wasn’t a beach, so we motored out to the idling plane. Where it disgorged our two friends, 200 litres of fuel, several cardboard boxes of food, packs of dubious canyon gear and a much debated and highly anticipated 200 litre black plastic drum. All good trips need a ridiculously large, impractical, of-no-apparent-use and difficult to move object.

Kylie had Covid, so it was her husband Ivan that had flown them out in a spectacular flight from Te Anau filled with amazing guitar riffs, scenery, banter, suicidal speed boats and low-level pass hopping. Apparently, there was a lot of weight on board. He left with a roar, wing waggle, a couple of cray, paua and a leg of venison, while two very happy passengers buzzed to us about the flight into Charles. We decided the best thing to do was go straight for a dive. JV had forgotten his mask and Toine didn’t have a weight belt. But as the sun set we dived for crayfish off the island. There was a bit of culture shock, civilisation to sunset deep exposed diving in Fiordland. We were back at camp on dark and as the others set up their respective tent and hammock Richard went to wash in the cold stream and I started on dinner preparation.



Rich wandered up to the fire and said he had tripped on the rocks after his cold swim. He didn’t think much of it and rolled up his pant leg to show me the bruise. As bruises went it was non-existent, however the blood, split skin and fat layers visible indicated that he would need stitches. He was very annoyed with himself, and the isolation of Fiordland was suddenly palatable.

*Richard on a sunny day in Charles steering the cat*



Luckily, JV is a competent doctor and as Rich stumbled up to him, he stopped putting up his hammock, inspected the cut, told him to wash it in the stream with soap and wait by the fire for suturing, minus the pain killers. I went down to watch/help? at the stream, there wasn't much to say. We both knew stitches and canyoning were probably not an ideal combination. After Rich went back to camp, I sat by the stream a little longer and thought how especially important it is to be careful out here. I had to stay on my game. Five minutes later, I was back at the stream washing my hand having just stabbed my palm with a knife. JV had paused once again in putting up his hammock, looked disappointed, his 3 hours sleep the night before briefly flashed across his eyes and his repeated instructions to wash it in the stream and go sit for some stitches sounded like déjà vu. The stupidity that I felt, and probably Richard too, was incredibly high. Richard got a box stitch and didn't complain or seem to feel any pain. This left me in an awkward situation, as now I had to pretend to be impervious to pain, and I didn't really like needles to begin with anyway. It wasn't too bad, and it got me out of filleting fish for 5 days, but I wouldn't do it again for fun.

Dinner began subdued, but soon everyone was back in high spirits and the stars twinkled while we watched small sharks swirl in the bioluminescence as they hunted our fish frames. It was somewhat surreal. There was no moon, just stars and sharks coated in bright, shiny, twinkling bioluminescence. We were watching shark galaxies swirl through infinity.

And so the second of April closed with two new people at camp, and four individuals alone in their bubbles of light wondering what tomorrow would bring.

Toine was excited to explore a potential side canyon off the side of the Irene, JV agreed to accompany him, and Richard offered to drop them off with the boat. I opted to stay at camp and rest my hand. As far as I can gather Toine climbed some pretty intense bush and cliffs and got into a rocky/boulder canyon with a bit of potential. JV stopped a little further down to look at some particularly impressive moss and Richard floated with the boat. It was a place where reality met insanity, but by chance and a little skill they drifted out alright. It was a day to think about how quickly things can change and to ponder the realities and vagaries of existence.

*Toine, in medium sandfly protection, cooking breakfast*





*It s not all sunshine and skittles*

Twenty-four hours had passed, the cuts could get wet, and the day was warm, as we sat around the usual breakfast fire, cooking fish, making hot drinks and pondering. Diving today. Richard and Toine headed for the shallow firewood beach and JV and I stopped to look for black coral. While he was in 100 plus metres of water and I was mucking with the fuel tank, floating beside the sheer granite cliffs, I noticed that the transom, or steel pipe holding the engine, was cracked. Almost all the way through. Floating 100 m above the seabed did not seem an ideal spot to sink an engine. Unless you never wanted to see it again, then it was probably perfect. There appeared to be no easy fix. We smiled, tied the engine to the boat and slowly motored to the bay. JV and Toine went spearfishing while Rich and I sat on the beach pretending we were fixing the boat. After a while, we even gave up on pretending and just sat in the sun.



An Inreach message was sent to Chucky asking for a new transom to be sent. Unfortunately, no one told him we were sitting in the sun, and there was great worry on his end as to our potential sinking. For better or worse none of the partners seemed bothered at our potential loss at sea. But we were blissfully unaware of messages that failed to deliver. Toine shot his first fish, JV was blown away by the vis and quality of the diving. Richard sorted the obligatory 4 o'clock lunch fire and I had my fingernail painfully squashed by a large cray. I let it go on the surface as I was too far from shore without a bag, the big ones don't taste as good, and my finger hurt. Sitting on the beach, beside the fire, eating fresh fish and staring out to sea, as the rain clouds gathered, was a nice end to the day's diving.

The next morning Toine sorted gear, JV and Richard communicated with Chucky, Marnix and Eve to get the transom and an extra mask and snorkel delivered. All I contributed was my postal address, and yet somehow the gear was delivered to the wrong address. Luckily, Eve rescued and delivered it to the heli base, but we would remain innocent of this for another two weeks.

Two waterfalls flowing side-by-side. It had blown Richard's mind. They were also in granite, which was the icing on the cake, there just had to be a canyon above them. How was it even possible for two waterfalls to be side-by-side in the same catchment – repeat statement 10x a day for a week. JV wasn't convinced so went hunting. But first, the four of us swam into the short, 50 m, Windward canyon. A spectacular spot. Then JV was gone, and we were climbing to find the double waterfall at

the end of the rainbow. Not much canyon, but steep mossy rocks and waterfalls and plenty of rain. I nearly tipped the



*Richard is unimpressed with Toine s lack of enthusiasm towards the double waterfalls*



dominoes of Troy, Richard and Toine down a mossy waterfall. They then decided not to follow me as closely.

Richard hopped along with his leg swaddled in foam, I banged my stitches knot repeatedly into the cut, and Toine styled everything and probably wondered who he had decided to holiday with for two weeks. Slipping back to the boat in the downpour, then roaring into the rain, with eyes stinging, towards camp was both enjoyable and cold. After

a quick change it was a rough, drysuit attired, ride in the gathering gloom to find JV. His camouflage jacket worked very well and he took a bit to find. No deer but lots of fun had. The ride back was bumpy. Richard drove, JV sat there, and I seemed to get almost thrown overboard every 15 seconds. Toine served hot drinks and we huddled under the fly in a proper Fiordland coastal downpour. That night we used the gas cookers, as opposed to the fire, to cook dinner for the first time.

As I floor-sucked the final tuna-feet-and-sand puddle out of the tent and spat it into the substantial downpour, I wondered if I would get much sleep that night. I also felt like a student. A few flashes of lightning illuminated a wet world, the stream roared, and as it was 1 a.m. and all seemed well, I went back to sleep, all be it a little further uphill. JV swayed in his hammock, and Rich and Toine were in waterproof tents, there didn't seem to be too many downsides of having a waterproof tent. Somewhere through it all I diligently recorded the barometric pressure 1016, 1008, 1001, 1004, 1014 hPa and then it was morning and quite warm and dryish, apart from the wet moss, dripping trees, bog, mud, streams; but mainly a dry day.

The blue water had turned tannin brown overnight, maybe we didn't quite appreciate the minimal clear fresh layer. Spearfishing for dinner now involved 2 m of cold tannin freshwater before hitting the nice warm sea. Hunting for dinner was a little harder and we had to work to find fish. Unsurprisingly the paua were still where we had left them. Maybe the fish were absent due to the freshwater influx, increased darkness or sharks. But several hours later we had enough for lunch and dinner. The butterflyfish were very well hidden at all our dive sites. For a place that doesn't get fished much they were always well in the weeds never popping out to be shot as a silly silhouette. Despite this, they were massive and tasty. An Inreach message informed us that Chucky, Marnix and Eve had the transom sorted and it was due on Friday. When's that? Oh, not tomorrow but the next day. Everything blurred, but still Toine and Richard sorted the canyoning gear for the morning.

It was too small a volume canyon for JV, read volume snob here. So he went hunting and got bluffed and walked up a mountain and down a stream and saw 100's of mammoth stags and apparently had a great time. In short, we three had a great time too, yeah. Second Hidden Canyon #2 would deliver on a low volume unique fun day out, ending with a jump into the fiord and a swim to the boat. Toine may or may not have caught a cray in his





teeth. Bashing up the TR to the 400 m. contour set off a few stags, and as we roared them in, we panicked that they were trigger happy hunters and quietly scuttled up the hill. Small volume, mossy, at times cold and windy, with plenty of tree anchor abseils and even two concrete screw drops the canyon was fun. Would you travel there again to solely canyon, probably not. But the jump into the fiord was a great touch.

The screw anchors were two 8 mm Hilti concrete screws, each one had a washer, and was joined by dyneema, with a centralised, isolated, chain link. Maybe a conservationist will return to unscrew them, or more likely they will join the hordes of rusty, seemingly, randomly placed things in Fiordland. If left long enough they will get historical protection, a bit longer and they will confuse aliens and if they are left for a very very long time they will provide iron for the final anaemic cockroaches.

Friday 8<sup>th</sup> of April - a new transom and almost a new boat. The new transom was delivered early so the heavy unnecessary junk we wished we didn't have missed its back-flight - and we would worry about how to get our excessive amount of gear out in two small boats until the penultimate day. The new transom arrived in a packaged and addressed box, a slightly surreal Christmas delivery. There were also two masks and a snorkel, care of Jamie. Pleasingly, the new transom appeared stronger and didn't have welded joints where the most pressure was applied. Having two boats working made us feel much better. A trip to Caswell Sound was now a possibility. But not today as it was already too late, with a strong wind blowing and a large SW swell running. A trip out to a slightly exposed beach at the mouth, TL, of Charles, for spearfishing, hopefully out of the tannin, seemed like a sensible plan. It would also give the boats/engines a good run before the trip to Caswell.

JV was driving and I was up the front, jumping back and forth plus side-to-side to help keep the boat the right way up, while he eased or opened the throttle as the 4 m swells dictated. We felt pretty good, testing the boat off the coast in strong winds and a big swell. Maybe we were a bit too relaxed. As the nose of the cat roared over the crest of a particularly large swell it hit a gust of wind blasting upwards. I jumped forward, JV held on, and the boat went vertical. Time seemed to slow, and I remember being at the top, looking around and seeing the whitecaps, the big swells, the waves breaking against the cliffs, Richard and Toine 400 m away in their boat, JV below me, and a lot of dark grey ocean. As the boat teetered I didn't feel anything and resignedly thought oh well looks like we are going over backwards. But for whatever reason the backwards momentum halted, and we banged down. Limited skill and a good chunk of luck. We looked at each other and quietly headed for the bay. A valuable lesson learned, and it would stand us in good stead for the





*Removing stitches*

rest of the trip. Don't go out in poor conditions. If you are out and the conditions turn for the worse don't roar off swells and keep the weight forward. We had yet to learn the weight-forward-swell-pouring-into-the-boat, one tonne of water acquired lesson. We didn't see eternity in an hour, but 1/3600 of eternity is still undefined.

The new dive bay was sunny, with no tannin in the water and heaps of fish and crays. As we only had 3 functioning sets of dive gear I fossicked and picked up plastic rubbish. Plastic bottle, plastic bottle, plastic bottle with message, plastic bottle.

A Taiwanese visitor from the past said hi. Sitting in

the sun I realised that it was the first time in days that I was dry and my clothes weren't damp. Coastal Fiordland seemed excellent at keeping us constantly damp and smelling of fish. Escaping beneath the surface opened a new world full of boulder caves petering to sand. The vis was so clear you forgot how deep you were. Around the usual 4 o'clock lunch fire, we decided that if the evening Fiordland Fisherman's radio weather forecast was suitable we would head to Caswell in the morning.

Fiordland Fisherman's Radio, Fiordland Fisherman's Radio, weather forecast, issued ....., valid until ....., forecast rapidly told. We had to record the forecasts on our phones and replay them several times to understand. We weren't salty sea dogs, maybe slightly itchy puppies. The gist, tomorrow was rough seas easing, 4 m. SW swell, long period, wind SW - 20 knots, residual NE chop. Good enough to go early morning. There seemed to be a weather window for the return trip in three days. I packed five days food. But what to take with us gear-wise? Full canyon setup, or sparse and hope for tree anchors. We went light, as no one particularly wished to sink off the coast of Fiordland. In reality, these canyon decisions were quietly discussed but heavily charged. It's hard to know what to take to the unknown. It can also be hard when exploratory canyoning trips aren't finding world class canyons and there is world class diving and adventure outside of the canyons.

Our boat is somewhere. More specifically at sea between Charles and Caswell, where it has just taken its first wave over the bow, surprising us both and slowing us dramatically. There wasn't much danger of sinking as everything was inflatable, but we floundered in the swell and watched the albatross soar. The coastline's teeth smiled at us for an hour, then it blew an icy breath out of its mouth. The catabatic wind pouring out of Caswell was cold and the waters in front were confused. It was a relief to be inside and behind the entrance island. The coastal passages were never free of anxiety, wonder or a feeling of insignificance. The feeling of insignificance oscillated from zen to intimidated-isolation. We hoped to hold the learnings from these perspectives, but they slowly vanished to a mere blur, often forgotten, but occasionally flaring as a sirens call.

It was a long sunny cold motor to the head of Caswell. We drank in the beauty of the new sound and marvelled at the scenery and dolphins swimming alongside. A quick look at the historic hut at the



head of Caswell confirmed it was historic, i.e. dark, breezy, dusty, built in the shade. It would be great in a storm, but we would go and find a camp spot. Looking on the sunny, north facing, side revealed that campers with their Fiordland-certified-campsite-maker-certificate (FCCMC) had achieved full marks by placing all campsites on the other side.



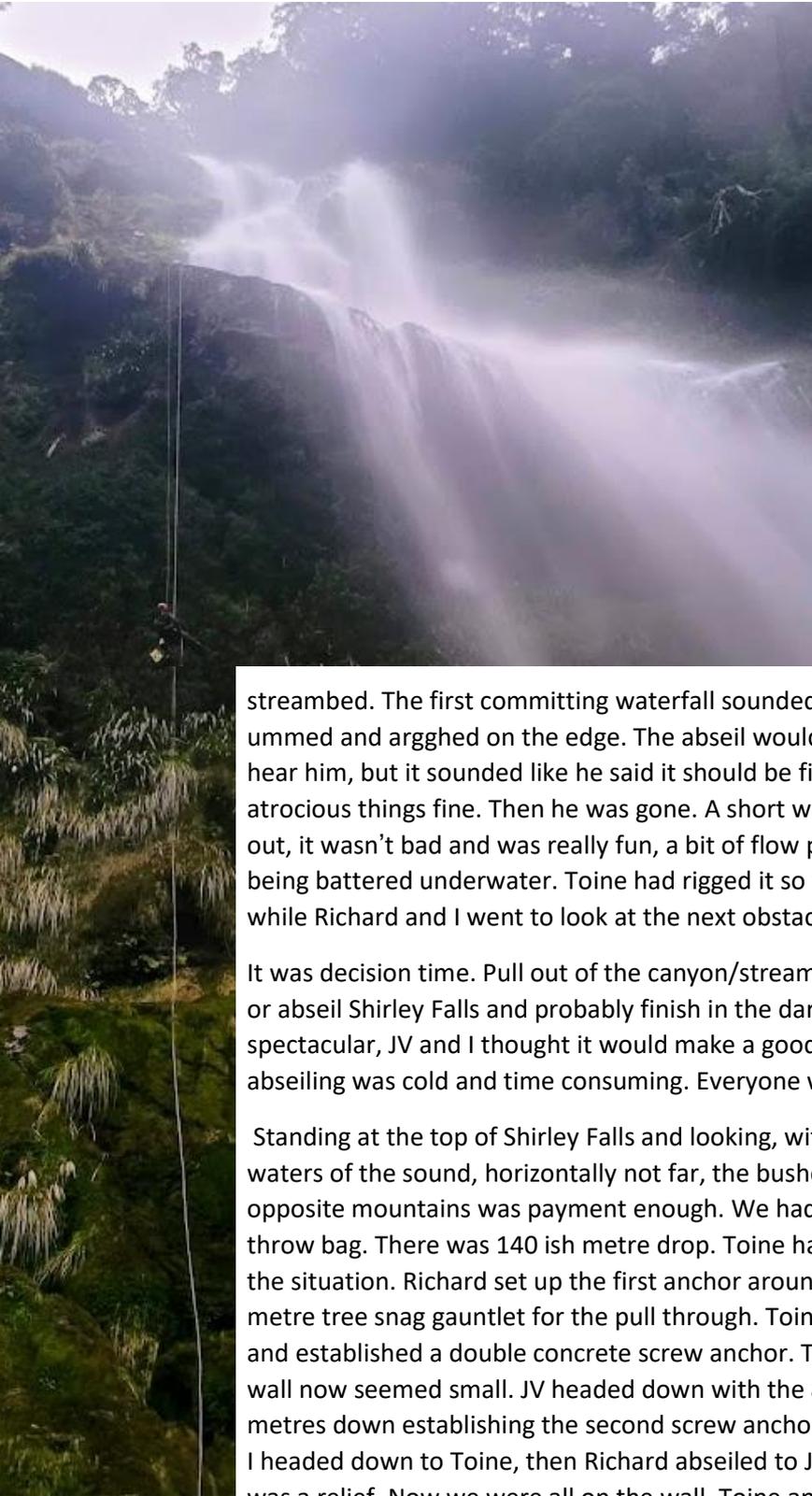
Richard had heard that the best campsite in all of Fiordland was on the east side of Green Point. It was pretty good, large, shady, occasionally damp, a short boat to freshwater, but most importantly it was flat and open with a safe boat anchorage. Flat or open ground, a novelty out here, another reminder of the difference between hard straight lined impervious surfaces and nature. But ironically, it was in Caswell where we would come to appreciate civilisation.

After establishing camp, we popped round the corner to dive for our dinner. It was murky and at times deep. There were large fish around and I speared a big cod, swam it back to the boat, gave my gun to JV and went to film Toine diving. The visibility wasn't great so after swimming with Toine for a bit I went off to film some rocks and sand. Sitting off a point watching the fish go by, I dived down to look at a passing ray. Back at the surface I spied a passing shark and dived down to film. It was more curious of me than I was of it, and it followed me back to the surface. Poking the Gopro at it wasn't as confidence-inspiring as the spear and I was a little bit frightened. Back at the surface I decided to swim on the other side of the rock for a bit. The others weren't that bothered by the shark but I did collect their fish. Back at the new campsite, around a new fire, looking at the stars we decided to canyon the stream flowing out of Lake Shirley, finishing with Shirley Falls, in the morning. Toine and Richard sorted the gear, JV packed, and I made lunch.

I didn't set an alarm for the morning, instead I slept out in the open and knew the sandflies would wake me at dawn. We took both boats across the sound. We left Richard's tied at the bottom of Shirley Falls and the cat pulled up the bank 500ish m. back towards the head of the sound. It was a



*First dive in Caswell*



steep climb up through ferns and trees. Toine was third in line and bore the full brunt of the first, and only, wasp nest we saw. He didn't complain and still motivated us to get to the lake. We hit Lake Shirley south of the 678 m. high point. It was pretty, and the bush along the edge made for slow going with a bit of climbing and wading thrown in for good measure. Lunch at the outlet around 1 p.m. and then we were off slipping down the mossy boulders. The canyon started to form and there were several enclosed abseils and a lot of walking/climbing down steep open

streambed. The first committing waterfall sounded intimidating from the top. JV went first and ummed and arghed on the edge. The abseil would be in and under the flow. We could barely hear him, but it sounded like he said it should be fine. JV has been known to call many atrocious things fine. Then he was gone. A short while later he walked out the bottom. Turns out, it wasn't bad and was really fun, a bit of flow pushing you around but no extended period being battered underwater. Toine had rigged it so finished the pitch and pulled the rope down while Richard and I went to look at the next obstacle.

It was decision time. Pull out of the canyon/stream and try to make it to the boats in daylight or abseil Shirley Falls and probably finish in the dark. Toine thought the abseil would be spectacular, JV and I thought it would make a good round trip and Richard thought waterfall abseiling was cold and time consuming. Everyone was correct.

Standing at the top of Shirley Falls and looking, with an uninterrupted view, towards the clear waters of the sound, horizontally not far, the bushclad hills and the evening light on the opposite mountains was payment enough. We had a drill, a 60 m. and 80 m. rope, and a 15 m. throw bag. There was 140 ish metre drop. Toine had a plan and seemed to be well in control of the situation. Richard set up the first anchor around a tree, the rope would have to run a ten-metre tree snag gauntlet for the pull through. Toine was lowered 40 ish metres with the drill and established a double concrete screw anchor. The thin washers holding the dyneema to the wall now seemed small. JV headed down with the 80 m rope, and Toine was once again 40 ish metres down establishing the second screw anchor under a wet roof right beside the waterfall. I headed down to Toine, then Richard abseiled to JV and pulled the rope. It didn't snag, which was a relief. Now we were all on the wall. Toine and I, cold and wet, were hiding from rocks

under a ledge, while Richard brought the 60 m. rope down. JV set up for the second pull down as Toine reached the bottom ish of the waterfall. I was cold so asked Richard if he would let me go next, which he kindly did. By this stage the sun had set and it was in the dusky, misty, wet gloom that JV pulled the final rope down the waterfall.



*JV partway down Shirley Falls*

*and at the top of Shirley Falls*



Toine and I had scouted a bit of a way forward into the bush. It was now dark, and Toine left to guide Richard and JV towards my light in the warm bush. We were still over a hundred metres above sea level and huddled in the dark bush, thankful and elated to be safely down the cold waterfall and out of the spray. Walking down steep bush under torchlight can be hard as the light reflecting off the undergrowth makes it difficult to see the drops. It was getting very steep. I stopped and put an anchor around a tree and Richard lowered me into the darkness. Two metres later dodging supplejack, branches and leaves I was part way down an undercut cliff and very pleased to be on the rope.

Forty metres later, I was still in the air and put another anchor around a tree, called the others down, then lowered Richard 30 meters to a steep wet stream. Reaching the bottom of that abseil Toine helped me pack the ropes and said JV and Richard were just getting the boat. I was surprised as I thought we were still well up in the trees. We were actually, about, 40 m from the boat, but it was dark and all I saw were leaves. I couldn't see the forest for the trees, or the trees for the leaves, or the boat for the void.

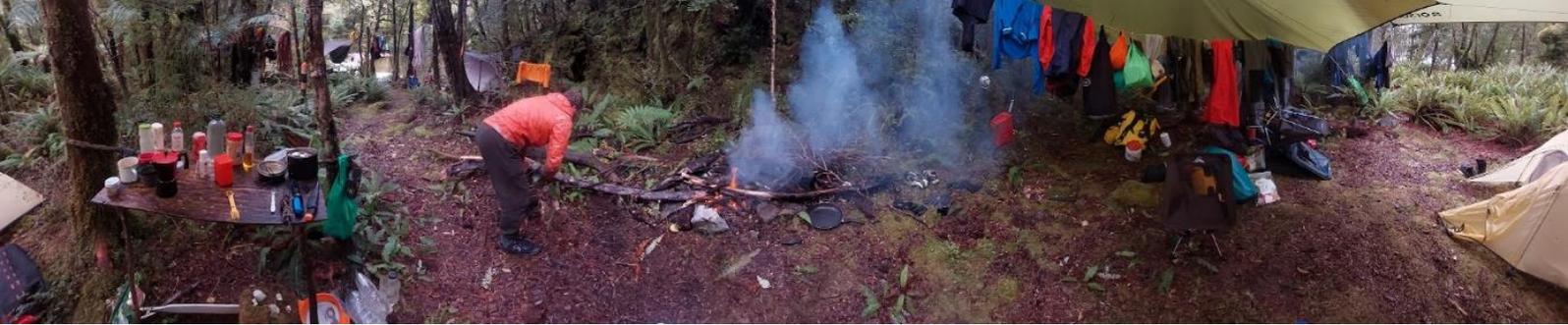
No moon and a pitch-black sound to motor across, to find camp against a black backdrop. The torches made it worse and so we drove in darkness. It was calm, there was no frame of movement, it was easy to fall out of reality and into nothingness. Only the wake snapped you back.

We were very content around the fire that night. Sometime after dinner the forecast said our weather window back to Charles, and food, had closed and it was unlikely to open for the next ten days. My five days food had about two left and it would now have to last another 10 days. Like most problems/challenges we came across we came up with a positive plan and moved on. No one dwelled on the what ifs, that didn't stop me feeling silly, but it certainly helped the morale.

Rain means growth, in the circle of life rain is needed to make plants grow. In Fiordland after canyoning, it means you don't get out of the bed in the morning. I took a five-minute video of a silhouetted beetle climbing the tent wall, elegantly moving one leg at a time and ever so carefully, with the occasional slip, making its way upwards. We had fish for breakfast, nestled under the fly. The need to catch fish to live off for the next 10 days, the rain, the days of adventure and possibly fatigue all combined to make us feel isolated once more. Yesterday at the top of the waterfall the isolation was a joy, today it weighed upon us.

But a need to eat is a great encourager to pour one's self into a wet wetsuit on a cold, dark, rainy day and go diving. Previously we would shoot about six fish between us and then look around. That was when we had more carbs. Now we were hungry and were planning on fish for breakfast, lunch and dinner. It was cold and dark, and the fish were deep. Richard and Toine were trying line fishing for the first time and JV and I were in the water. The others hadn't had any luck. I had been working hard and after pulling the trigger and nothing happening on the first fish (someone had put the safety on - something I never used). I had shot a large terakihi and a blue cod. A kingfish swam into view, it wasn't massive, just legal, so I hesitated and let it circle past. But hungry in Fiordland is hungry. As it edged out of range the spear hit it in a perfect holding shot, barely missing the vertebrae. I swam it back to the boat where it went berserk, but by then Toine had it aboard.

*Shirley Falls in the daytime*



I was working hard again as the fish seemed to have disappeared. I got another cod. No one else was getting anything. Toine was filleting, and Richard was fishing then picking up the fish I had shot as I was nervous about dark water, sharks and blood. Diving off a dark rocky point a big murky shape with a black triangle cruised through the water below. I convinced myself it was a ray, but the fish still didn't reappear. I swam over to JV, but he hadn't seen any fish. I was going slightly deeper and seeing the odd one but nowhere near the numbers from previous dives. Coming up a rocky pinnacle I noticed a big terakihi headfirst in a crack. It wasn't moving much nor doing a good job of hiding. Closer inspection revealed it had a 20 cm bite out of its back. It was having a bad day so I thought I should probably shoot it. It didn't move so I left for the surface. It was about six metres down and it hadn't moved. We were hungry and I waited for it to move to get a shot that wasn't into the rock. I decided to break my rule of don't-shoot-into-rocks and put the spear against its head and fired. I obviously didn't miss, but as expected the spear was stuck in the rock and the fish's day had another turn for the worse. The benefit of the float line was obvious once again as I dropped the gun and swam for the surface. I called JV over but he couldn't budge the spear. It was still dark, cold, and rainy, and now a partially eaten fish was off the spear and on the line between the gun and spear, 5 m down. It seemed extra silly, as we would really need these guns for easy food. Richard came over with the boat and I swam a throw line down and clipped it to the spear loop. He pulled from the boat and the spear didn't budge. I swam down and with the thicker rope for better grip failed to budge the spear with Richard assisting. Once more I dived down and with a feral tug pulled the spear loose. The fish was still there and its day finally ended.

I was cold and puffed. Richard and Toine decided to go line fishing and JV and I headed for camp to warm up, and then possibly dive again. JV was keen to dive, I was cold, but it seemed like a good thing to do on a wet Fiordland day. Across to a new spot, on the opposite side of the sound to camp. It was a steep drop off, I shot a terakihi, and decided that was enough and swam to find JV. He was a fair way away. He seemed to have a habit of being beside you then next minute several hundred metres away. He had two fish and before he had the spear back in his gun a large shark swam up to his fish. He pulled out his knife and swam at the shark, scaring it away. He didn't seem too concerned but we swam the fish back to the boat. Once again the live fish had disappeared, so we chose to head for camp.



Coming into the camp bay something didn't look right with Richard's boat and both he and Toine were fussing over it. They both looked shaken. A shark had popped one of their boat's chambers. It sounded dramatic and had once again shown how quickly things could change. They were fishing, first and only day with lines, and pulled up a shark on the handline, it went mad on the surface before snapping the line and putting two 5 cm. gashes in the rear chamber. They heard a hissing and realised they were losing air and sinking, quite far offshore. Their radio calls to us were met with silence as we

were underwater, swimming away from our own shark. They went to shore, Richard being well prepared, patched the boat with tape, pumped it up and Toine held his hand on the patch as they headed for camp.

The barometer was dropping rapidly, the seas were rough for the foreseeable future, it was raining, we had a popped boat, limited food (that wasn't fish) and there were plenty of fish bigger than us in



the sea. We were happy and as the rain poured, we caught a glimpse of what adventuring must have been like in the past. Ours, however, was tempered by the fact that we could push a button and a PLB would send a message for rescue. The mental fortitude and self-reliance of people doing big trips without communications seemed almost unattainable.

Sashimied kingfish was delicious. Funnily, we weren't sick of fish having eaten it for at least two meals a day for about two weeks. Dinner was always relaxing as the sandflies had gone and we could talk about the past, present and future. Now dinner was extra good as we had fish and rice instead of fish and fish. There was no fire tonight as it was properly raining, over a foot of rain would fall that night, on top of the rain that had fallen during the day. Lying in bed, listening to the heavy rain, and waiting for the forecasted wind and lightning I was suddenly aware that we were down to one boat again and I wasn't sure how well tied up it was. A nude dash through the rain, past a swaying hammock, confirmed that the boat was fine, and I was wet. Shortly later, the wind hit. Nothing then a massive gust roared in. I could hear Toine, whose tent was near the camp flies, battenning things down. I was warm and snuggled into my sleeping bag and he seemed to have it under control – thanks for that Toine. The rain was heavy as we drifted off to sleep. Sometime during the night lightning appeared directly above us and thunder shook the ground. Hell of a night to be in a hammock I thought.

It was clear and cool in the morning, day 17 for Richard and I, day 10 for JV and Toine. Richard started work on patching the orange boat. Toine was helping Richard, I was cooking, surprise surprise, fish for breakfast and JV was still in his hammock. He appeared fast asleep, hammocks in storms, and a newfound hobby of drinking from seagull poo infested puddles, would keep him around camp and in and out of the hammock all day.

Richard and Toine planned to take the cat out spearfishing near the mouth of Caswell and I headed off behind camp to look for a deer. The bush was wet, but sun was peeking through the trees. Hunting and fishing for food seemed to apply a little more pressure to the individual, as well as encouraging perseverance. There were plenty of tracks and sign and I wandered around and headed uphill. I was feeling un/surprisingly fatigued and low on energy while puffing up the steep bush. Reaching the hanging valley above camp I hunted upstream. There was not much going on except that I felt tired. I heard one deer and smelt another, but nothing felt like being shot, which is fair enough. I hunted upstream until dusk, wondering if I would make the shot if I saw something. Nothing going, a drink of water and back down the stream. Irrationally, I felt I had let the team down. Rationally, I knew that was hunting, sometimes you got something and sometimes you didn't. I made it back to camp in the dark.

JV was back in his hammock, but thought he was getting better and would get up soon. Richard and Toine had just got back as well. They had had an interesting day. They headed out to the island at the mouth of Caswell. Crayfish and fish were everywhere and the diving sounded amazing, even compared with all of our other dives. There were so many fish it was, apparently, confusing as to which fish to shoot. One of them was on the boat when they noticed that the anchor-line was floating. They pulled it in and found the end of the rope and nothing else – no chain, no anchor. The boat had been drifting, luckily someone was onboard. They remembered feeding the anchor out and everything seemed fine. However, there was a D-shackle in the boat with no pin. They spent a lot of the day unsuccessfully diving for the anchor.



The evening radio forecast no longer said rough seas for every day. The morning had rough seas easing then maybe a pause before the rough seas resumed. It was enough to warrant an attempt but not enough to ease our anxiety of a potentially rough coastal trip in small boats. We packed everything in camp that we could and sat down for, hopefully, our last fish and rice dinner for a bit. Even though we knew it was only a fifty/fifty chance of getting out in the morning, and it was

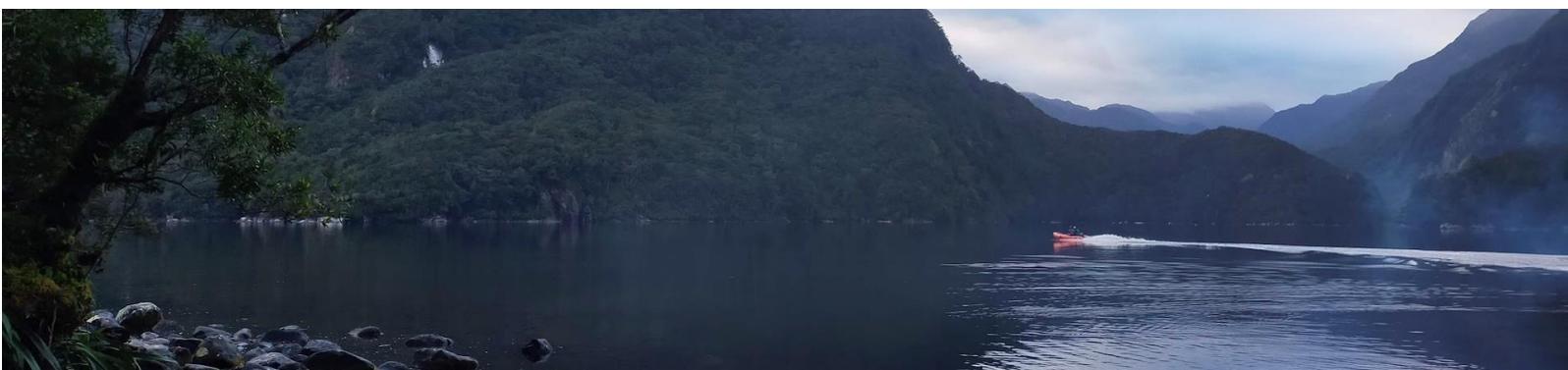
another 7 days to the next weather window, there was a hopeful enthusiasm around camp.

It was 5.30 a.m. and it was dark, cold and clear and we were taking the tents down and packing. At around 6 a.m. in the twilight before dawn the boats were partially packed with bags spread from the camp to the boats. **ROARRRRRRRRR**. The rumble seemed to go on for a very long time and shake the very air we breathed. It sounded like a tree cracking then a massive earthquake. But there was no ground shaking. Richard yelled, "Landslide". "It's directly across the sound from us." Quickly tie the boats. Grab the gear, throw it randomly up banks. Grab a PLB and run for high ground. Wait in the grey light for a wave to wash in. Nothing happened and we had to re-find all the gear we had thrown up a bank and repack the boats. As the day dawned a new landslide was visible further down the sound on the opposite side. It seemed several hundred metres high and more than a hundred metres wide, terminating in the Sound. The trees were gone. Just a brown stain on the rock remained. Glad we weren't camping there.

Richard's repair job hadn't worked properly and so a bit more tape was applied before the final pump up. We would have liked to inspect the slip and dive at it, but our weather window was closing; so JV and I left first. Richard and Toine would catch us at the mouth in the faster boat.

We were expecting an interesting ride and so Toine had fitted a new flipline to our boat and we had our masks around our necks as well as the usual PLB, drysuit, lifejacket, radio and knife. We were charged and felt like we were riding into uncertainty. The strong catabatic wind blew as we raced towards the mouth. There was no sign of Richard and Toine. They didn't answer the radio. We waited. And waited. The window was closing. They better not be checking out the slip, we fumed, as we headed back. The nerves from the anticipated coastal trip were starting to show and we assumed we had missed our window. Then they appeared. What? "We had engine troubles and Richard had to change the spark plugs", was the cheery comment from Toine. The day kept on giving. Turn around and head back for the coast.

Richard had a hard time sticking with us as his boat seemed to plane or stop and we were somewhere in the middle. They were often out of sight on the backside of 4 m. swells. The going was good with large, long period SW swells. But there was a NE chop on top which broke the uniformity of the swells and occasionally steepened them uncomfortably. We were banging over waves; I was up the front and JV was doing an excellent job driving. I looked down and to my dismay saw that my sharp rescue knife had fallen out of its sheath and was bouncing around on the inflated floor and walls. Yelling at JV to stop, resulted in the sudden flooding of the front of the boat and the



knife swirled, as I fished for it. Another great one for the nerves. I put it back in its sheath and buried it in a pocket.

We were on our way again. The wind started to pick up and the currents and swell became confused as we rounded Islet Point. Suddenly we had a tonne of water onboard. The engine was going full throttle but we weren't moving and the water didn't appear to be either. We looked at each other in a bemused fashion and I jumped back as we floated above water, yet full of water. Not much to say sometimes. The water drained and the catabatic whipped out of Charles. We were close yet we had to take a few more seas over the bow and get scared by the catabatic wind before we were allowed safely into Charles. Richard and Toine had had a relatively pleasant trip around in their boat. We were starting to think that next time we would take a different boat.

It was a relief to be back in Charles. We had our old camp and food stash to look forward to. There was still apprehension about how to get the gear and ourselves out. We were due out in three or four days and still had the uncertainty of the coastal passage. But for now, we could relax in the sun and appreciate being in the safety of the sound.

Richard and Toine sped off to look for Andy and his launch to try and get our gear a lift out. JV and I cruised up the arm, enjoying the sun and watching deer ramble across a slip. We cruised to the helipad to check if Amazon, a local cray boat, was around (it wasn't) and then floated off camp in the sun – as usual camp was in the shade (FCCMC).

Richard and Toine arrived, the mood was festive and the tide was low, so we laid our gear out and had brunch in the sun. Opening the half-eaten chocolate and breaking into the carbs and eggs was a bit like being a kid at Christmas. Incidentally, there had been a flash-flood through the camp while we were away. The beach was scoured with a new metre deep channel and the vegetation was torn. By chance, I would like to claim skill but alas it was not, we had placed the gear, within the

somewhat-useful 200L drum, at a spot the flood missed. Maybe it would have been fine camping there, the hammock trees were still standing, Richard's and my tent spot was fine. Toine would have been wet.

Andy had gone but Richard chatted about a yacht. Warwick and his crew had sailed from Whangarei, around the top of New Zealand and down the west coast to



end up, after many adventures, in an isolated sound talking with two people in a small boat. Richard asked if he would take the thing previously known as the ridiculously-large-impractical-of-no-apparent-use-and-difficult-to-move-object (now known as the somewhat-useful-200L-drum) for a sail, please. As luck would have it, Warwick was sailing to Doubtful in the morning and he agreed to think about the said object, and would let us know in the afternoon.



The afternoon rolled round and Richard I went to negotiate the transportation of a barrel. Warwick and crew couldn't have been nicer. As we approached Andrew and Nadia were in their dinghy astern, about to head hunting, Warwick was lounging, and Brenda was below. They were a little concerned about the Takacat sinking off the coast so agreed to take, not only the drum, but the cat and JV and myself. We left with a feeling of gratitude and kindness. Back at camp there was now a sense of relief and holiday-like festivity. Richard and Toine packed for their coastal voyage in the morning. Then we all went for a cruise in the last of the sunlight enjoying our final evening in Charles. We were relaxed and took time to sit back, enjoy the view and drift through the past 19 days.

Richard and Toine were away early, JV and I got up to wave them off. We agreed to meet near Dea's Cove. Their boat was still leaking a little air and they were going out to the coast alone. We thought they should be fine, but there was a small feeling of splitting the team. JV went for a last hunt and I tidied and packed up at camp. Then JV was back, the cat was loaded, and I sat on top of a large barrel, on top of a fully laden Takacat, on top of the sea, while JV slowly motored us towards the waiting yacht. Incidentally, a pod of dolphins leaped about.

The yacht's rear aluminium frame flexed as it took the weight, and the 200 kg barrel was winched, pushed, and conclusively swung aboard – no limbs were pureed. The cat was partially deflated and lashed up front and the remaining gear tied to the rails or stashed in the forehatch. The 45-foot yacht made short work of swallowing our stuff. Good mornings were exchanged, and we motored past camp and towards the mouth of the sound with a feeling of elation and the beginnings of homecoming. As we neared the mouth Andrew threw a short cord, with a small white tuna lure attached to the end, behind the boat. It wasn't long before he hauled in a chunky bullet of skipjack tuna. Sashimi for lunch. He bled it by cutting from behind the pectoral fin towards the head, the blood rapidly exited the body all over the deck. A lot of blood for a relatively small fish. This was all new to us as we had never caught tuna before. But we knew bleeding them quickly and then rapid cooling was important to get the best meat.

The line was 45 degrees to the boat. I think you might have another one. Pull it in Andrew replied as he finished cutting up the skipjack. I grabbed the thin line in my hands and started hauling. Hand





over hand. It crossed my mind that I was probably hauling a tree or some sort of snag as it oscillated behind the boat. It was quite heavy. A bit closer to the boat, hmm must be a shark. Closer again and Andrew let out a whoop, Southern Bluefin Tuna. He ran for a gaff. I kept hauling. Gaffed and aboard, a beautiful fish. Solid, iridescent and big. It thumped around the deck, huge amounts of power. A line was secured to its tail, then it was ickyied and bled. A lot of blood this time. Nadia was fuming. Southern bluefin tuna is classified as an Endangered species (IUCN status) on the IUCN Red List of Threatened species. It had been reclassified from Critically Endangered in September 2021. As of 2020, the current mean population estimate is 13% of unfished levels. Its stock status remains "overfished".

Luckily it was directed at Andrew and we played simple – not too hard a challenge for JV and I. Nadia had an excellent point, and we were going to enjoy but not waste any of the fish. We didn't put the handline back out. Watching the coast slip by from the yacht was a completely different experience to bouncing rapidly along in fear in a small boat. There was plenty of time to enjoy the view, birds and newfound company. "Log ahead", JV yelled. We all got up to look. **THUMP**. Didn't expect it to be that close Warwick commented. We were nearing the mouth of Doubtful and a massive tree had just hit the boat. Luckily, it's a steel boat with a keel running from the front to the back, as opposed to a vertical keel, Warwick continued. And the log rolled onwards.

As we neared Dea's Cove, Richard and Toine rumbled out to meet the yacht. Their passage had been fast, fun and beautiful, and as we tied up in Dea's Cove they came aboard for tuna and stories. After lunch we unloaded and retired to the hut; with an agreement to meet on the beach that evening for gin and tonic. Life certainly fluctuated, apparently with more regularity out here.

I had never eaten fish head. Andrew had smoked it on the fire. I was slightly hesitant but it was delicious, especially the fat behind the eyeballs. New friends, a roaring fire on the beach, fresh fish and venison, three-week-old-veges and a star filled sky, a perfect final night in Doubtful sound. Then we retired to the hut to tell stories until the early hours of the morning. Somewhere in the wee hours JV and I wondered why we agreed to go hunting with Andrew and Nadia at 6.30 a.m..

Pandora was the first human woman created by Hephaestus on the instructions of Zeus. She opened a jar releasing all the evils of humanity. It has been argued that Hesiod's interpretation of Pandora's story went on to influence both Jewish and Christian theology and so perpetuated her bad reputation into the Renaissance. Later poets, dramatists, painters and sculptors, and map makers in Fiordland made her their subject. All in all a strange but beautiful river to hunt, somewhat wet. A few stags roared disinterestedly, none of the evils of high velocity humanity were released and so we left and motored back to meet the yacht.





Warwick had a bus to catch and he was not going to be late. The yacht wasn't at Dea's Cove so we continued, expecting to see them around the corner. We caught them near Deep Cove. We had just enough time to pull up beside them, jump aboard (leaving the boat to be towed astern) and drink several hot drinks, try a selection of cured meats, discuss the complete works of Shakespeare, try a few more cured meats, and critique the art of sausage making.

With minimal effort Warwick came alongside the concrete jetty at Deep Cove and exchanged a 200 litre barrel for his daughter. One last delicious, cooked lunch and a lot of fond memories. Then JV and I were off to find how and where Richard and Toine were.

We met on the water part way back to Dea's. If you have, hypothetically, ever let your parents down, you may have experienced a feeling similar to how we felt – a new and strange feeling for both of us. Richard and Toine had cooked breakfast and waited. And waited. And waited. They weren't angry, just disappointed in their two wayward disowned sons. We moved on and I like to think that everyone lived happily ever after. The mid-water plan: Richard to run the 21 km. over the 671 m. Wilmot Pass, to bring the truck back; Toine would climb a waterfall; and JV and I would think about what we had done and go and get the rest of the gear, and eat the packed lunch they had made for us – it was delicious.

We took our time heading back to Deep Cove, enjoying the last moments in the sound. A final wave to the yacht, as they left, and we were ashore at Deep Cove. We unpacked the boat and stood around. With not much to do but get eaten by sandflies we decided to walk to Helena Falls. We were enjoying the view from the base of the falls when we received a radio call from Richard. He was back early, being a super-athlete had its benefits, and would pick Toine up, then come and find the lost JV and Troy again. In the drizzling darkness the truck appeared and a couple of hillbillies jumped on the back and went to load their boats.

Once again, the gear was loaded on the tray and the boats were thrown and pushed on the back. The engines got a space in the double cab, and I had the privilege of sitting on them while the other three squashed in the front. One to steer, one to use the pedals and one to change gears. It was a relief to unload the boats at the shore of Lake Manapouri and return the truck, unharmed, to its cosy parking spot. It was late and we happily trudged into the visitors centre and threw our gear throughout the building. Toine subconsciously knew I would have Indian pickles in a glass jar, so had brought some naan. We made curry. Everything went in, onions, lentils, paste, gnocchi, salami, peanut butter, sand, butter, olives and some other random things I have thankfully forgotten. It was delicious. Having a dry, warm, well-lit room to spread out in felt intensely luxurious and preposterous.





We were expecting the 6.30 a.m. wakeup. We were seasoned visitor centre campers. The roar of the heaters and blaring of light was a friendly welcome-home. We had to open the doors to let the curry and sock smell dissipate throughout Fiordland. We needed to be out before the boats came at 8 a.m.. I found a vacuum cleaner and in a fit of guilt did a round, one more than I have ever done in my room.

A familiar face walked up the ramp. Eve. Yay. By chance she was working today and offered to take a

large pile of our important extensive junk across the lake for us, in her proper boat. Richard and Toine left to meet Eve at the wharf and JV and I enjoyed a cup of tea onboard with Eve and Julie. Eve actually was at work, so had to head back up the lake; and JV and I potted off to the Takacat. It was quite light to lift down to the water. That was until we put the 200 litre drum, now somewhat lighter, up the front. This served the dual purpose of, primarily, adding a sense of symmetry to JV's life and secondly, to add a little weight to the somewhat non-repentant flip-inspired bow. There was nothing of particular use in the drum. We had a few muesli bars, a lighter and a cell phone in our pockets. The day was fine, and we felt like we were already home. A disjointed static radio call from Toine. Blur, static, wind, blur, static, static, stick to shore, there are massive..... static.....static. "Did you understand that?" JV murmured from across the boat. "Yeah bit of wind, stick to the side", I nonchalantly replied. Probably nothing to worry about. And we were off happily banging down the lake, merrily jumping over waves, watching the sky and looking for dolphins. Rounding the corner the wind picked up a bit more, this must be what they meant we thought. A little further along and it was no longer fun. There were numerous waterspouts on the horizon and torrents of wind carried water were whipping by.

We really didn't want to get hit by those gusts or waterspouts. JV was doing an excellent job driving and we painfully edged towards the bank and a bit of shelter. It was sunny and we were sitting in a small eddy watching gusts and waterspouts rip across a side arm and down the lake. If we wanted to go anywhere we would need to cross that arm. JV thought he had better call Toine on the cell, the radio wasn't working. Comically, as I rowed in circles watching a small bit of anarchy loosed upon the world, JV explained to Toine's wife, in a calm manner, that's things were great, and we were having lots of fun, and everything was fine. Wrong number.

Sometimes the accidental script is the best. We wished we had thought more, unfortunately not too uncommon an epiphany. Not much to do, worse things happen at sea. We lacked conviction and at worst were full of passionate intensity. Three kilometres/ish to cross, and spouts and gusts passing randomly.

Motoring slowly across felt like a sanitised version of Russian roulette. Three quarters of the way, no hits, we might make it untouched. Then there it was. A massive gust and water ripping towards us. It felt massively intimidating as we waited for it to bear down on us. JV let out a whoop and I had a chuckle then we were hit. There wasn't much to see, we were just flattened by water and wind. Then it was gone and we continued to the other side. It seemed to take a long time.

On land Richard and Toine had sorted the gear and called Eve, in a bit of a panic, to see if she would check-in and maybe rescue us. We didn't know this and as we rounded a point and saw the big boat approaching we waved



*Stars and fire from Charles camp*



merrily. I was actually thinking, “great - now a boat full of tourists is going to watch us drown.” A second gust unexpectedly smashed us from behind, flattening us once again. Just wave, and hope they go away was the silent message.

Onboard Eve wouldn't admit to knowing us, as everyone thought we were idiots. They were probably right. Waves, wind, waterspouts, a large black drum and a Takacat expertly driven by JV with a guy flopping around at the front made for a unique sight. How much time can you spend in fear? Quite a bit. But it did get better and as we rounded the point into a calm Supply Bay and the end of the trip we didn't quite know what to say. Although it did feel like a fitting ending to a trip.

Richard and Toine came down to welcome us in. We exchanged stories. They had seen the wind and waterspouts and radioed to tell us to turn around. That's what that radio static was about. Then they had skipped the worst of the wind and avoided all waterspout and made it to Manapouri to sort the gear and cars. Richard had sent an Inreach message at 10 a.m. to say we were out – JV and I would only get off the water at 1.30 p.m. (this message would later cause a bit of confusion). Then they had worried about us. They thought there was no way that we would be silly enough to go out in that. Richard had an inkling that we were consistent, therefore silly, and told Toine that it was on us and we would probably be fine. It was great to be back together and we excitedly splashed around the lake edge and danced around the carpark. JV and Toine went off to get another car and Richard and I cleaned the gear.

The takacat floated away. Sometimes you are just so happy to be on land that you forget the basics. Nothing really matters ..... and they all lived happily ever after.

THE END.





Thanks to the NZ canyoning association for supporting the trip. Chek them out sometime <https://nzcanyoningassociation.org/>

All your float plane needs....

<https://www.wingsandwater.co.nz/>

Photographs by the four of us.

Thanks to Richard for organising everything, JV for doctoring (amongst other things) and Toine for the drive and enthusiasm. Thanks for letting me borrow your gun Sim. Sean who sorted last minute transport over the pass, via Brendan was massive. Possibly the biggest thanks to Marnix who let a few people of dubious ability borrow his boat. Having Chucky to send through weather forecasts and coordinate transoms with Jamie and Eve was pretty amazing. It's always easier to see underwater with two masks - thanks Jamie. Warwick and crew thanks a lot. Who knows where we will meet next. Finally, Thanks to Eve who sorted buses, boats and parcels for us.

Maps:

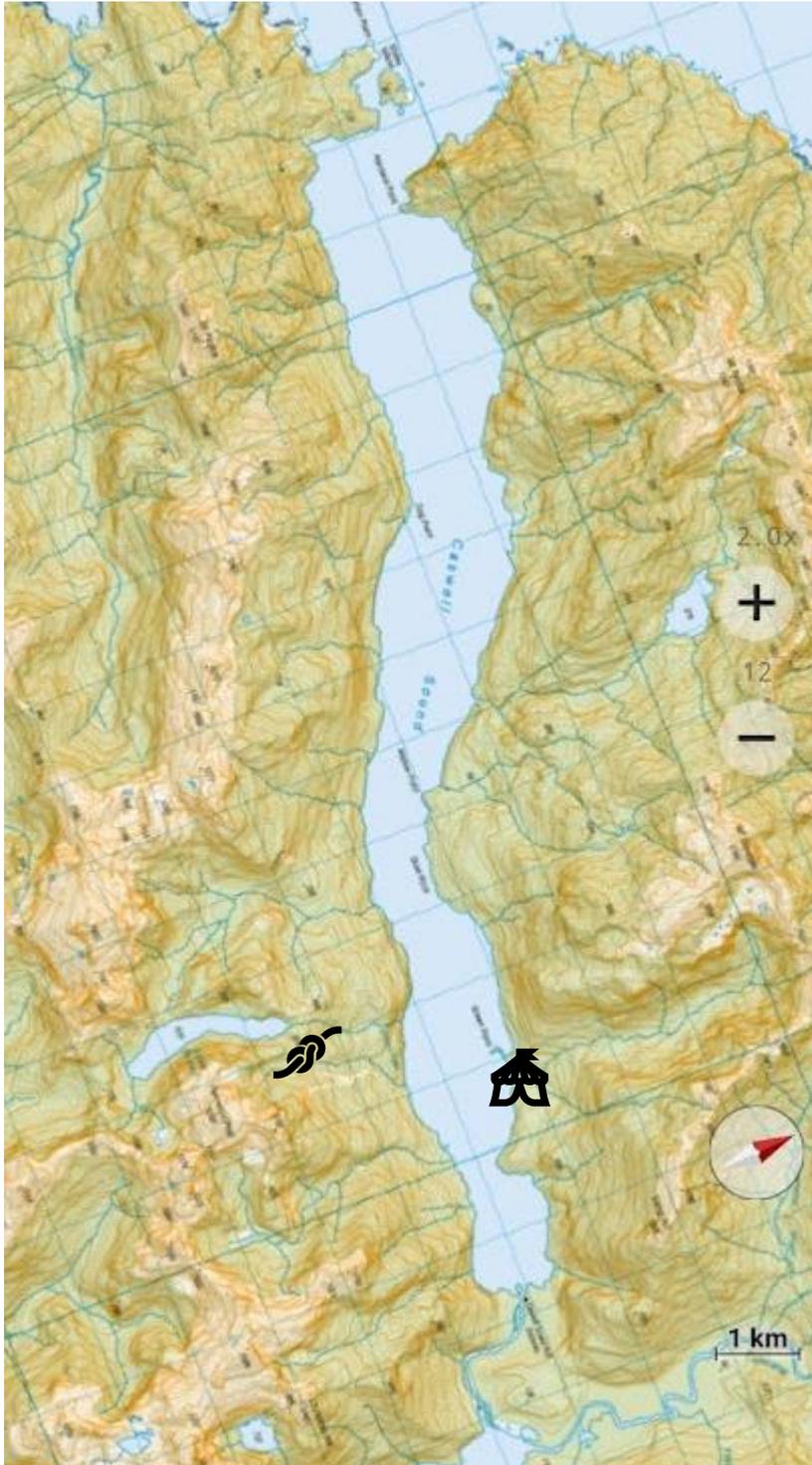


Charles Sound



-  Exposed diving bay
-  Firewood diving bay
-  Camp
-  Jetty helipad
-  Canyon/streams descended

Caswell Sound



 Shirley Falls, canyoned from lake

 Camp



Nothing made me feel so insignificant as sitting in a small inflatable boat just off the coast of Fiordland