

Sport Southland Kiwi Seniors

March 19-21 2010 - Weekend Camp at Tautuku

18 excited walkers gathered at Stadium Southland in anticipation of 3 days of adventures, exploring and activities.

The chatter was high and reminded me of years gone by and a 'school trip'. The enthusiasm was beyond doubt - eager.

On arrival at McLean Falls – we discovered that the tail door of the covered trailer had sprung open and some of our gear had littered the 10km of winding road leading to the falls. The powers that be – were definitely with us that day with the following car and a very kind North Island couple picking up everything from seats, boots, back packs, walking poles and packets of biscuits (well crumbs). We got everything back and other than a couple of small rips and scratches the gear escaped relatively unharmed.

The sun shone on the cascading falls, creating a 'crystal' like effect and the 'Prince of Wales' feather fern was gently waving in the breeze.

Tautuku Outdoor Education centre greeted us with a small army of 'Te Namu's' however a little bit of 'Bug Off' soon had them sorted whilst we ate our lunch. The afternoon was filled with familiarizing ourselves with the camp walks, flying fox and 'Claytons' kayaking. The tide was right for us to venture down to the beach to view the 'Iris Caves'. A couple of hesitant people managed to wash their boots – but the sand, surf and open air were all magnificent. A number took the opportunity to walk in the therapeutic salt water. The night was filled with various entertainments from all the participants, including fly swats and balloons, bowls, table tennis, skits, dancing, games and recitals.

Early to bed saw some of us early to rise - as they say (the early bird catches the worm – but the second mouse gets the cheese). A huge pot of porridge was stirred to perfection and then consumed with the usual additives. Lunches made, gear packed and we were away by 8.30am on our first adventure, meeting up with a 125 horse Southern Cavalcade at the Catlins River bridge. Three of these participants were relations of our leader. They had left Owaka and were heading for Tautuku and we were doing the opposite. However I felt that our posteriors would possibly be in better condition at the end of the day.

Our first stop was Pounaweia where we completed at low tide the Interpretative Track, where sea meets the forest and is slowly eroding the impressive peat bog wetlands. Onto Tunnel hill to walk through the 225m long masterpiece of brick construction that was never used, due to the closure of the sawmill in the area. An impromptu left turn by our curious (nosey) driver saw us head along an 8km winding gravel road to the magnificent 'Cannibal Bay' where numerous Sea lions basked in the sun. If it wasn't for the odd flick of sand from their flippers – anyone could have mistaken them for being a 'washed up' log. A family of sea lions headed out to sea as we ate lunch and we watched them frolic in the surf. A brisk wind whipped up and this gave us a spectacular display of the surf tossing the waves into foils of mist as they drifted out to sea. A long walk along the beach saw us view the sea lions close up as they stood tall and barked a warning at us that this was their territory and would you please leave.

Back on the road we visited the new Owaka Museum and their film footage of the Manuka and Surat shipping disasters that the rugged Southern coast had claimed in the 19th century. By this time the tide was back in and we undertook a good undulating walk comprising of stairs and pathways from Jacks Bay to Jacks Blow Hole. The blowhole is 200m inland and the water rushed in and gave us a noisy display of this amazing natural phenomenon. By this time the day was starting to draw to a close and we had just enough time to view the magnificent Purakanui falls, before returning to our base camp for pre-dinner entertainment and a well earned 2 course meal and a night loaded with entertainment. Not too much will be said about the night other than a skit of a senior lady with a medical issue and some dance instructions from our very experienced walker 'Joan' will remain with us for some time. As they say – what goes on camp stays on camp – but a hilarious night of entertainment and activities was held and we certainly did more than our share of 30 minutes a day 'Push Play'.

Not such an early start the next day and I think that this was directly related to the previous day of activities and entertainment. Another large pot of porridge consumed and another round of filled buns and we were off to Papatowai where we were all impressed with the 'Gypsy Gallery' and this young mans' talent to make water wheels out of paua shells, moving whales out of old iron and a cycling skeleton. We followed a good walk down to the picnic area and out onto the Catlins River estuary. We listened and watched the bellbirds sing and munch their way through the mistletoe seeds and then promptly bombard us with their low flying aerobatics when we were too close to the food source. A return to Tautuku Beach with a good walk along to the Fleming River where we waded and crossed at the convergence onto the Tautuku Peninsula. A number of walkers were hesitant about this as it was certainly testing their comfort zone. A lot of preparation had gone into executing this exercise to make sure that 'safety' was not compromised and that we had a positive outcome. There is no other alternative way to get to this private area other than by air. It was here I met up with some local fishermen who showed me a 'leather fish'. Ugly could be a word to describe it – but it certainly was aptly named. By this time the tide had turned and the weather had followed suit as we re-crossed back to the mainland. A bit wet and weary we headed back to the camp, ecstatic that we had made these journeys to so many places and over such a wonderful weekend. Not only were we active – but we had also enjoyed a wonderful weekend of camaraderie and I know that a number of friendships were formed and everyone was anticipating the next weekend.

Ann Robbie