

French Pass Revisited 11/11/11

French Pass was a place I always had to go back to after my first visit which almost ended in disaster when Wayne Lester's boat, (that I was towing) full of gear pushed us gently off the road after Okiwi bay. It was an eventful trip, however I did get some diving in then and could appreciate the possibilities of the region and so promised myself I would go back some day. That was in 1993 and so it's taken me a while.

This year I made it along with 19 others and there was no sliding off roads or other incidents this time round and the place lived up to my memories of a nice beach, calm water, a great old house and good company. Special thanks must go to Grant Prebble for organising it including a very efficient tank re-fill service, which Tony King ran.

I was on Brian McCullum's boat and what a good one it was with Eddie Lai and Lorraine Ferreria making up the rest of the crew. We had a good mix of diving and fishing, with scallops, blue cod and sole fish being caught. We also saw Octopus, carpet sharks, red mullet, stargazers and at one point Dusky Dolphins. Our first day spent in and around the beef barrels and that picturesque row of small islets at the bottom of D'Urville Island. We then moved through French Pass and onto a beach off D'Urville Island where we hunted scallops. The sea was flat the sun shone and we had a very productive and pleasant day.

The next day was a little windy with a small spot of rain to begin with but settled down to be very good as well and for those with yesterdays sun burn quite a relief. Lorraine proved to be the champion scallop diver on this trip catching quantities that saw some looks of disbelief on some older salts.

Evenings were spent sampling the fare caught including Paua, Crayfish, Scallops, mussels and sundry beers and wines etc taken along to help it all slide down. We had the insistent company of weka and wood pigeons plus the odd duck that wandered under the tables picking up the chips etc that fell.

While the rest of the island had rain and rough weather we had the best of it, with visibility averaging around four metres. Attached is a photograph of an octopus with a carpet shark firmly in its grasp that came up with the anchor. The shark was tangled in the anchor rope and the octopus was pretty mad at having been interrupted in the middle of his tea. We managed to sort it out and the octopus left with his tea still firmly in his grasp. (Thanks to Eddie Lai for the photograph)

I would recommend to anyone this part of the sounds for its natural beauty, nice water and abundant marine life. Going with pleasant company just adds to the fun. So make sure you're on the next trip!

Ted Loughnan

NB: Also attending; Grant Prebble, Dominic Manera, Peter Woods, Brian McCullum, Kurt Hancock, Glen Wyatt, Larry Thomas, Terry Reilly (& Lynne), Bruce Henderson, Robyn Black, Tony Clarke, Eddie & Shiela Stancombe, Nadine Kachev, Eddie Lai, Lorraine Ferreira, Tony King