

Lang's Be

By Judith Simpson

Jim, the Weather Man, got it wrong again. Thank goodness we didn't cancel our walking weekend because he said it was going to be torrential! We've just returned from three days magnificent walking at Lang's Beach which is about 90 minutes north of Auckland.

The coast line is really beautiful and although Langs Beach is obviously a very popular spot for holiday homes, and I don't mean the ordinary NZ Bach, we walked in splendid isolation each day.

On the first morning Jac led us through regenerating Manuka bush to the edge of their property and pointed us in the right direction for the DOC coastal walk to the Mangawhi Heads.

It was great to see Fantails bouncing around us and to hear the odd Tui call and to see tiny Rimu, juvenile Lancewoods and even the odd spindly Kauri pushing up through the grassy stuff beside the path.

Now we're not what you would call trampers, merely invigorated walkers, so we thought it was pretty cool to be striding along a partially sealed single lane road that lead up to farm gates and some sorting yards. But, alas, we could go no further!

Two big dogs growling and showing their teeth. None of us were game to open the gate so here we were, half an hour into a five hour

Top left: The tress bent over with the wind.

Middle left: The rocky coastline.

Left: A tree hugs the coastline.



The well formed cliff track.



My favourite walk

Above: Three hardy walkers ready to start the day's walk.

Araroa Trail.

What a beautiful sight. A wide, well formed track with views out to sea and along the cliffs to die for. Well worth our struggle. The sea was like a washing machine and the tide was out so we could see amazing patterns along the sand. Wonderful photo shots everywhere. We loved the stroll along the cliff tops even if we did have to hang onto our hats. In desperation I found a spare bootlace and tied my hat to my back pack and glad I was too, as the wind whipped it off my head several times. Some of the trees were twisted with the wind and the old pohutukawas that clung to the cliff face had to be captured by our cameras.

One hundred and ninety five steps, beautifully made, led down to the beach and then it was a short stroll along the hard black sand to the Mangawhai Beach Surf Club. We hadn't seen a soul since the farmer,

ach walk

walk and we were going to have to go home! What woosers.

But then the farmer came out of a shed. The wind was a howling gale (more of that later!) and we shouted our little heads off all to no avail. The wind was in the wrong direction. Eventually we did manage to attract his attention and like all dog owners he said his dogs wouldn't hurt anyone. Yeah right!

The wind was so strong we could barely keep on our feet. Our hair was streaming as though we had put our fingers in a plug and our shirts and trousers billowed out so that we looked like Michelin men.

It was a warm wind and all we could do was laugh and take photos. The lane led us to a DOC stile and signpost but we had been told that there was a short cut that went around the steep gully and wasn't quite so breath takingly steep so we ignored the stile and continued up the lane only to be pursued by the farmer who was fed up with trampers marching across his land and so we returned graciously to the stile.

Going down the gully presented no problem really. It was steep but walkable and the views out over the farmland were beautiful.

Northland had obviously had a wet summer because the grass was so green and lush I thought I must have dark glasses on.

Now we had to go up. It looked perpendicular. Even the sheep had a job making zigzags across the hillside. Friend Raewyn, who is a real trumper, would have laughed at me and shot up like an arrow. I didn't want to think of her, I just wanted to get up.

By virtue of many gasping stops we made it to the top and then it was a small gradient, quite pleasant really, with a grove of Nikaus and some Kauris to the beginning of the Mangawhai section of the Te

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Lang's Beach



Above: A tricky rocky part along the track.

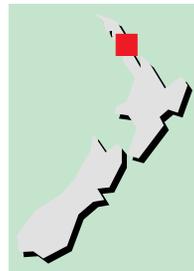
so it was good to see lots of people out investigating the rock pools and enjoying an invigorating walk.

The round walk back to our lodge wasn't an option for us but it did look as though it would be interesting and probably challenging so we decided to walk into Mangawhai Village, get a coffee and then phone our hosts who had promised to come and fetch us if necessary. It was necessary.

The food at the Lodge was exceptional. Nibbles before dinner out on the terrace in the late afternoon sunshine and then an evening meal that any restaurant would have been pleased to present. We would definitely have to walk vigorously the next day to walk it off!

Jim still wrong, no rain, and the sun was shining as the next morning, Natalie led us northwards through a denser bush up towards the Bluff and the trig point the next morning. More fantails and the remains of the biggest wasp nest I have ever seen.

It took three days to kill the little devils off and the ground below the branch where it had been hanging looked like a mess of shredded paper. Some lovely specimens of Rimu and several 100 year old Kauri



giants but what about the Kowhai trees. I've never seen so many in the bush before, and why is it always such fun to find a ring of spotted red mushrooms. We could almost believe in fairies!

The view from the trig point was out towards the Hen and Chicken Islands. What a wonderful name for this group of islands that guard the bay. We lay back in the long grass and watched the clouds racing across the sky. We could see crocodiles and bunnies – who said we couldn't be fanciful?

Natalie led us carefully down the steep path (not as steep as that hillside of yesterday) to the beach and with a wave of her Leki stick in the direction we were to walk she disappeared. Puff. I must say her instructions, briefing and maps were excellent. We never at any stage felt directionless.

Another hard sand beach but this one had lots of driftwood and rocks and stones to entertain us.

We didn't have the wind of yesterday to contend with and so could meander along, poking and peering and then stopping for morning tea perched on an old driftwood branch.

What a wonderful way to spend Easter. But this wasn't going to get us to Waipu Cove so upwards and onwards. We had a small rocky outcrop to negotiate to get around to Langs Beach and although the tide was out it was going to be some energetic scrambling or slightly wet feet.

We chose the wet feet and three of the four of us stayed dry! Langs Beach had a coffee cart so, as we felt deserving, we headed for that and a small crowd of like minded people. We were definitely a point of interest. What were we up to with our Leki sticks, day packs and walking boots on a beach busy with holiday makers in jandals and shorts and even togs!

St James trail upgrade to benefit families

Families with young children and off-road wheelchair users will enjoy greater access to the iconic backcountry of the St James Conservation Area thanks to a project initiated by Conservation Minister Kate Wilkinson.

The project will see a section of the St James Cycle Trail upgraded to make it suitable for those unable to follow the longer trail.

"New Zealand has the most stunning scenery in the world and I was really concerned to think those with physical disability or young children would be prevented from experiencing our amazing back country," Ms Wilkinson says.

The 64km-long cycle trail passes through the magnificent grassland valleys, river valleys and beech forest of the St James Conservation Area, near the tourist town of Hanmer Springs.

Work is soon to begin widening and adding to part of the trail to create the 15km "Homestead Run" loop track.

"The loop will offer a taste of the trail for people with less time, less experience and those who are unable to negotiate the longer trail," Ms Wilkinson says.

"With a 1.5m wide track and easier gradients, it will be ideal for



Above: View looking down Peters Valley, where the loop track will pass.

parents to push buggies and for people in off-road wheelchairs. This more accessible backcountry experience will also benefit the booming local tourism industry."

The 'Homestead Run' loop track will start and finish at the St James Homestead. It will take in the last 7km section of the existing cycle trail up the scenic Peters Valley, then along the Edwards Valley 4WD track to Tophouse Road, leading back to the homestead.

The new dual purpose track is expected to cost around \$170,000; with \$100,000 coming from the Ministry of Economic Development's New Zealand Cycle Trail project, and \$70,000 from the Department of Conservation (DOC).

The project is expected to be completed in time for summer.



Right and above: The waves below crurred up by the strong winds.

Folk were quite impressed when we told them where we had come from and where we were heading. I should perhaps explain that we four were/are of the retired generation and are grey haired and not terribly fit looking!

We needed that coffee. The "Lions" had recently completed a track from Langs Beach to Waipu Cove with a sign that said 1 ½ hours? Thank you Lions. You were brave and courageous to even contemplate the exercise.

The first part was a little difficult and narrow but with peeking views through to the cliff top and the sea. It was quite tangled and overgrown and hardly room to pass if anyone came towards you.

We were glad we had our sticks but then were passed by a young girl in jandals who said she was off for a coffee. Seemed a bit of an excessive way to get a coffee when we knew there was café at Waipu Cove!

And then we came out of the scrubby part and onto grassland and Pohutukawas along the clifftop. Amazing views down to pancake rocks just like Punakaiki on the West Coast of the South Island. Quite big waves were rolling in and crashing on the rocks. We just had to sit down for a bit and watch.

The wind had come back a little and I had to get out my bootlace again. I'd never have retrieved my (new) hat if the wind had caught it and whirled it away. We followed cattle tracks along the cliff top admiring the sea, the clouds and the sea birds on one side and some huge holiday homes on the other. Is there really a recession or did they all have For Sale signs up on the roadside?

We scrambled over stiles, farmers stiles, not like the beautiful new DOC styles and wished we had longer legs.

We clambered over rocks and through gaps we thought wouldn't be wide enough and even had to swing down holding a rope in one part. It was a great walk. We loved every minute of it and of course I exaggerate a little as I tell my tale. Most good walkers would enjoy the day out as I would say our level of fitness was pretty average.

And then the last undertaking. The river to cross. We had been warned that even at low tide it could be deepish so should be prepared to get wet feet at least! Ah ha – no trouble for these ladies. We found a convenient tree with branches that hung out over the water and bingo we had swung across with not a droplet near our feet.

Across the road, very conveniently situated was the Waipu Cove Café. Delicious ice creams as a treat for a day well spent on our beautiful Northland coastline. A lady came over and said "you made it then". She had spoken to us at the coffee cart at Langs Beach.

No, we were not going to walk home, so a phone call to Natalie and 20 mins later, after a walk of five hours, we were back at the Lodge and preparing ourselves for more delicious nibbles before dinner. Wonderful hosts, Natalie and Jac. Thank you.

Somehow we felt we had done our dash and chose not to do the planned walk on day 3.

Instead we drove back into Mangawhai Heads and walked along the grass and up and over the clifftops that looked down onto the lagoons and moorings. So completely different to the other walks. With the wind they had been wild and exciting and so beautiful. This walk was calm and quiet, the boats bobbing at anchor and dozens of gulls and oyster catchers in large groups. They all looked as if they were having a meeting and then suddenly they would whirl away like a cloud and then settle again until the next time.

Time to say goodbye to our friends so another coffee stop was called for. A voice said "where are your sticks and why aren't you out walking?" It was the same lady! A small place New Zealand. A wonderful way to end a weekend of fresh air and feasting.

We headed home to the Bay of Plenty feeling rather pleased with ourselves.

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