

## Operation Safe Landing

### Crossing the Ditch – Lot 41 with James and Justin

In late 2007, James Castrission and Justin Jones planned to kayak 2200 km across the Tasman Sea, from Australia to New Zealand. If successful, the pair would be the first to ever make the crossing in the longest two man kayak expedition ever undertaken....

James and Justin arrived safe in New Plymouth, New Zealand in mid January 2008 after a grueling journey from Australia kayaking over 3300 km in 62 days. This is the story about organizing the final safety operation to help ensure the safe landing of Lot 41.

On 11 January Geoff Grut and I headed to NZ on our mission to steer Lot 41 to a safe landing. The story starts a couple of years ago when Justin and James approached my company Pacific Sailing School, to do some courses which included Safety and Sea Survival and Marine Radio and to get them some offshore experience.

I then met one of the boys' Dad who asked whether there was anything I could do to help the boys. I remember saying that I would try to get a boat to give them some sort of a safety net. Justin and James gave me a call to ask whether I knew anyone who could paint the kayak. I called ex-students Geoff and Denise Grut from Bondi Collision Centre who gave Lot 41 its first colour in distress orange. A year later after some minor modifications to Lot 41 and a new sponsor 'Unwired' Geoff painted Lot 41 a second time – this time in the sponsors colour green and white.

Lot 41 departed from Foster on 13 November 07, operation safe landing began.

We departed Sydney on our Coastal Skipper course in a northerly direction with a crew of students hoping to see Lot 41. They were in the south current, going very fast and already far out to sea. Our next support option was to sail from Lord Howe Island. Bruce Stacey was on stand by, Lot 41 passed south of Lord Howe Island.

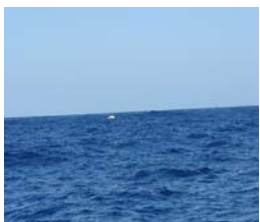
Towards Christmas, operation Safe Landing was in full swing – In NZ, we needed three boats from three possible landing destinations. We also needed local pilots with local knowledge, the Mayor at each base, rescue, surf boats, jet cats, NZ customs and Department of Agriculture all needed to be consulted. Hydrographic charts, satellite phones, printed Google maps of possible landing areas as well as navigation systems all had to be in place. AIS tracking systems to establish movement of large vessels and fishing trawlers in the area were loaded onto my laptop. Michael Campbell (well known NZ golfer) called Tom his Dad in NZ. The boys wanted to ensure we respect the local Maori custom and hopefully get a welcome to NZ.

The Pacific Sailing School office didn't get to see me for some weeks... My kitchen (as seen on ABC national TV) became the hub for dozens of people to plan a safe landing for Lot 41.

Finding a boat in Manukau was the next problem. "Geoffrey, do you have any relatives in NZ?" I asked hopefully. He called his mum who was visiting Aus from NZ, "Hey Mum, do you know anyone with a boat in NZ?" A nephew, Daniel Miller, a volunteer coastguard at Manukau, with the biggest and fastest boat on the west coast of NZ, called Extreme, became our pilot vessel. We then were offered a 90 footer out of Kawhia and a fast jet cat by the Commodore of New Plymouth Yacht Club. Safe Landing was operational.

On 12 January we arrived with a tonne of navigation gear and met Daniel. At 4.00am we headed out from Kawhia to search for Lot 41 and establish that the boys were ok. Based on the most recent position on the Crossing The Ditch

website Lot 41 was around 140 km due west of Kawhia (67nm from Manukau, 49nm from Kawhia and 49nm from New Plymouth). We searched the horizon for some time and started an expanding square search pattern in accordance with our Safety and Sea Survival Course to find them. It was difficult to try to spot a kayak in the 3 metre swells. Finally Daniel briefly spotted the white hull of Lot 41 on our starboard side only 100 metres away before disappearing again behind the waves. We had nearly missed them!



First sighting of Lot 41

We found the boys shirtless and enjoying the sunshine. Extremely suntanned, they looked like they had been out on a paddle for just a few days instead of on a 62 day world record breaking adventure. Contrary to the press reports the boys were in good spirits and physical health, their grins almost as big as the sea. After lots of laughing the boys said that we looked like a pretty sight, being the first humans they had seen in 7 weeks ('Daniel, remind me to get the Doc to check their eyesight too!').



I called James' mum, Mrs. Castrission on the satellite phone to tell her that we had a couple very fit looking young gentleman 2 metres from our stern. I told her to say hello and held the handset over the stern as the boys yelled 'Hi Mum, Hi Mrs. Castrission!' At that moment I knew all was well and that our mission of securing Lot 41 a 'Safe Landing' was looking very good.



First human contact in 7 weeks – “a pretty sight”

I had researched three possible safe landing destinations based on the boys' position. The original intended destination of the treacherous Manukau heads was now out of the question, although I visited the lighthouse and memorial to the tragic loss of HMS Orpheus and 189 lives in 1863 – NZ's worst maritime disaster. I signed the guestbook on Justin and James' behalf with an apology for not making it to the scenic area this time around.

The collage includes a photograph of a lighthouse on a rocky shore, a guestbook page with handwritten entries, a photograph of a dolphin, and a framed picture of a shipwreck. The guestbook entries are as follows:

14/1/08	George Benson	US St Georgia	awesome views
12/1/08	George	M. Fox-Spencer	
14/1/08	John Merion O'Sullivan	Norman Rd Takapuna	GREAT VIEWS!
14/1/08	Cirena	Eloucester NSW/Australia	
14/1/08	TOMMY WISE - c/o	LOT 41 JAMES + JUSTIN	SORRY WE DIDN'T MAKE IT HOME

The boys asked whether it would be safe to head to New Plymouth where family and friends were waiting. I advised that New Plymouth was safe and that they were in luck as a big high over New Zealand meant lighter winds and seas abating. I asked if they could see the summit of Mount Taranaki (also called mount Egmont, 2517 meters high) covered in snow above the clouds, which we had seen about 10 km back. I think this spurred them along with the thought of family and friends now only a few days away.



I then spent some time on the sat phone to notify the reception committee at New Plymouth of the boys' final destination and ETA. We stayed a short time with the boys as we were low on fuel (it's a big paddock and it took a long time to find the speck 'Lot 41' in the ocean that far away from NZ) and then turned back and crossed the bar at Kawhia just on dark. The boys paddled all night with one on and one off and made up a lot of distance.

The next morning we headed to New Plymouth on Extreme to check out the entrance and landing options. We loaded another six drums of fuel on board (now onto about our 30th drum) and left to find Lot 41 again. We spent the night with them and guided them in towards New Plymouth around noon.



**Daniel Miller loading fuel drums 31**

A massive flotilla of kayaks, jet skis, and boats greeted us on the way in. I don't think the boys will ever forget the reception as they looked towards the beach and asked why there were so many rocks onshore.



**Part of the welcome party**

“They're not rocks,” I said. “They're people!”

The shore and Harbour arms were packed with thousands of people, family, friends and locals including the New Plymouth Konohi Ki Te Kanohi kapa haka group who performed a fine welcome haka.

We had to push the crowd back out of the water to let the boys touch NZ to ensure they successfully crossed the ditch unassisted. A friendly touch of Lot 41 so close to the end of their ordeal would not have been welcomed!

It was hard to get through the crowd so the boys jumped out of the kayak as their rudder ran aground – proving that their legs were fine after weeks at sea. Woops they jumped and forgot their passports. The Customs and Dept Agriculture officials' were great and completed their task without fuss and very professional.



The celebrations lasted well into the night

**Thank you, Thank you**

To the New Zealand people, the reception was the best.

**Special thanks** to the following people who were either on standby or helped Terry in some way.

**Mayor of New Plymouth** Peter Tennant who rolled out the red carpet.

**Commodore of New Plymouth Yacht Club** Denny Holdt, for the Bouys and offered a Jet Cat safety vessel.  
**Customs and Department of Agriculture** who were very patient when the boys jumped out of the kayak and forgot their passports.

**The Coastguard** who helped with the cordon that protected Lot 41 on approach to the beach.

**The BP Surf Club Boats crews** mostly crewed with young girls and boys who came from several clubs in the area. Their cordon around Lot 41 was such a great help and invaluable to the successful landing of Lot 41.

**Colin and his daughter Amy** on the Jet Ski on the beach at NP.

**Weather people** – Roger Badham, Brian Hamilton. **Oceanographers Peter McComb** and David Griffin

**Signal Station Manukau** - Evan McGregor

**NZ Government** – Stewart Rawnsley who co-coordinated NZ Departments, Customs, Dept Agriculture, Donna Barker from Manukau Council.

**Rescue Wellington** – staff for keeping an eye over Lot 41.

**Simon Blundell** from [www.digiboat.com.au](http://www.digiboat.com.au) who provided both Lot 41 and Terry's laptop – with easy to use and essential navigation system. Simon spent many hours with Terry setting up Com and Nav systems.

**Steve Old** who introduced Terry to the Commodore of New Plymouth Yacht Club.

**Bruce Stacey** – backup team in Lord Howe Island

**Gunnar Tuisk** – backup team from Sydney

Michael and Tom Campbell who introduced Lot 41 to NZ council and the special **Maori welcoming** people.

**CYCA** who launched Lot 41 for test paddle

**Vice Commodore CYCA** Gary Linacre and member David Lawson who provided back up GPS systems.

Ross Allen from **NZ RFD** and Chris Bone for organizing a life raft for Extreme

Snow & Bronwyn Anderson from **Kawhia Harbour Views** – Cape Cottages who provided accommodation for the Extreme support crew.

John Gardiner/**Chief Instructor** who swung Lot 41 compass, instructed on the Safety and Sea Survival courses.

**Allan and Jane Rutherford** who offered their 90 foot vessel and pilot information at Kawhia.

**Bondi Collision Centre** – Geoff and Denise Grut who painted Lot 41 and provided the connection to get a vessel in NZ. Thanks also to Geoff relations - Julie Grut, Mrs Gaynor Wyatt, Paul and Vivienne Yardley who all made our stay in NZ wonderful, fed us and arranged nephew Daniel Millar boat Extreme.

**Stormy Seas**, Gary Schipper for providing James and Justin with their Stormy Sea vests and tethers.

**Owner of Extreme**, Daniel Miller who provided the biggest and fastest pilot/safety vessel on the west coast and guided Lot 41 to a safe landing.

**The NZ Oil Company** who paid for Lot 41 fuel

**The NZ Beer Company** who covered the welcome evening and dinner.

**Qantas** who covered my flight to NZ, when I arrived a day late.

And finally, thanks to Justin and James and the many other sponsors. The team were professional and all bases were covered. Our involvement with Lot 41, small compared to others, was inspiring. Safety was paramount. To work with them was always a pleasure and a great experience. It was an honor to be involved with Justin and James, two fine young gentlemen who I expect will have many more successful and safe landings.

We wish them very best.

Terry Wise and the Pacific Sailing School team.

[www.pacificsailingschool.com.au](http://www.pacificsailingschool.com.au)

**We teach sailing, safety and Fun!**

(Photos courtesy of Terry Wise)