

MOU WAHO° THE SECRET PARADISE

BIO



I'm Alexandre Gendron, Photographer and adventurer from France. I've been travelling two years in Australia and New Zealand. My favourite spot is definitely in the mountains to set up my tent and make the best photos I can. In March 2016 I will start a 1 year journey on my bicycle avoiding planes and any kind of engine use to get from Wanaka in NZ to Paris in France.



There is a place in New Zealand where you can be on an island on a lake on an island on a lake on an island.

This is the place where I spent this adventure! It starts in Wanaka, a little town in the south island of New Zealand and as you must be living in New Zealand, you certainly know it already. On this island you can find a few Buff Weka, these are flightless birds. Not shy at all, you might have the chance to meet them when they come around to see if you have anything to eat.

Mou Waho, An island on a lake on an island on a lake on an island



^ Getting lost on the way back and finding beautiful spots.

How to get to the island.

Everyday there are two commercial boats going to the island but this option offers you just a few hours to stay on it. The best way to get to the island is with your own floatable device so you can stay longer than just a few hours. Trust me, it's worth it!

By Canoe, Kayak or Stand Up Paddle, it will take you 3 to 4 hours depending on the weather and from where you start your adventure. We, Iva and me, studied where was the best place to go from the land to Mou Waho. We ended up in West Wanaka at the Matukituki's river mouth which, I think, is the shortest way to reach the island from public lands.

It is 12km of paddling and if the winds are strong it can be challenging with some waves and strong currents as soon as you leave the river mouth.

The weather

The weather is one of the keys of this adventure. If it is not good enough for the couple of days we will be on the island, it would be better to postpone it or simply cancel it. Even if it's a lake, there can be some pretty solid waves and I don't want to be in the middle of the lake in this cold water, even with a life jacket.

We checked the weather for the next three days. It looks good and not too windy. We still have to leave early on our way to the island, as the wind will become stronger in the late afternoon.

The boat

We've had to find a boat to go on this adventure, and this task haven't been easy while it was Christmas and everyone was out on the lake. We finally, thanks to Iva's friend, managed to get an authentic Canadian canoe with dry bags and life jackets. This was perfect.

Let the adventure start!

Everything seems to come into place. We have a boat with life jackets and dry bags, we have a good weather forecast for the next three days, we have some food and some wine to celebrate Christmas on the island - let's pack everything and go.

We realised that it was a huge organisation to put the canoe on the roof, being sure to have everything we needed etc... Usually for hiking, I'm organised and can pack everything in 5 minutes but this is our first trip on a canoe so it took a bit longer than just packing for a hike.

We finally arrived at West Wanaka in the late afternoon when the wind started to become a bit stronger than in the day. As it is middle of the summer, we still have 4 to 5 hours of sun. We will be all right.

As soon as we reached the border between the river mouth and the bay, it started to be more difficult to paddle and to keep a cap. The waves were quite big and the current really strong. It was difficult to keep going and we felt a bit discouraged at some point with the feeling of not progressing.

We finally came out of the bay and as I expected the current and waves to be bigger in the middle of the lake, it appears that I was wrong. This last part was easier to paddle through. Maybe because we could finally see the island.

Krystle > diving in the mirror lake.



The night has been short but I was really happy to have so many great pictures and this awesome timelapse. This island is really photogenic.

Discovering the island

We arrived by night and were not able to discover the island before we set up the camp so in the morning it was the best time to do it.

We started walking around and discovering some great point of views and we met the other campers who came for the sunrise on this top rock where we've set up the camp.

We enjoyed every moment on the top rock and decided to go for a swim in this lake on the island. As the water is still and the lake quite small with dark water, the water is really warm.

Next time I will set up the tent on the island on the lake. So I will be able to say that I spent a night on an island on a lake on an island on a lake on an island. This is a bit like inception I have to admit.

The way back

This time no wind at all and a strong sun. It was so easy to paddle and the water was crystal clear. When we reached the bay, we decided to have a rest in the shade of a tree. The sun was so strong that we felt a bit sick of it.

After a 3 hours nap on the shore, we finally get back on board and ended our adventure at the sunset with an amazing moonrise over the lake.

Conclusion

This 2 full days adventure was our first one on a canoe and we realised that it is not as easy as it seemed. When it's windy it's hard to go forward and keep a cap and in the opposite when it's still but sunny, the reflection of the sun in the water makes the journey challenging and hard to get through.

I will definitely do some other adventures like this as I like to feel like Robinson Crusoe discovering desert islands (even if it was not).

Handy details

If you want to go to Mou Waho, you have different choices:

1. Your our own boat
2. Wanaka Kayaks, they organise overnight trips on the island
3. Wanaka Eco Tour, you will stay just few hours on the island.
 - Be sure that the weather will be good for the time you are staying on the island or you could stay stuck on it for a few days if the wind is strong.
 - Be sure to clean after yourself and take with you all your garbage
 - Check out for your food and pack everything well for the night as the Weka are smart and they know where they can find your food!
 - And the most important, enjoy your time on this beautiful island.

If you want to see my time lapse of Mou Waho that night, you can check it out there: <https://youtu.be/JSdrrywoQ-E>



Moonrise >



The West side of Mou Waho, simply breathtaking



< Krystle on her way back from Mou Waho.

^ Canoeing our way back.