

## CAUGHT OVGARD

## The international incident that wasn't

By LUKE OVGARD  
For the East Oregonian

BAY OF ISLANDS, New Zealand — After a solid first day of sea kayaking and getting the lay of the land, we decided to mix it up the second day.

It was great in theory, but kayaking for miles in high winds all day was exhausting. Carrying the kayaks by hand up the beach, over the rocks and then five blocks back to the hostel we were staying at was excruciating.

When we repeated the next day, even higher winds blew us onto an island. The island was absolutely covered in sea glass, and after I filled up a small bag with it, we shoved off again.

Fishing was decent, but impractical. The wind didn't let up, and we were forced to land on another beach.

Little did we know that we were about to start an international incident.

## Beachhead

The beach we'd taken our reprieve on was Waitangi Beach.

For those not familiar with New Zealand's history, the country is unique among white-settled nations in that white settlers didn't rape, pillage, enslave, and subjugate the natives. Instead, the native Maori and the white settlers signed a document called the Treaty of Waitangi, which basically served as the country's founding document.

Every year, on Feb. 6, a ceremony is held at the location of the original treaty when a war canoe is launched from a sacred beach. A beach two fishermen had unintentionally landed on in a windstorm — in early February.

We failed to realize what we'd done until a procession of Maori began carrying a ceremonial canoe down to the beach and a large procession of officials joined them.

There were cameras and around 100 people in tow to celebrate the birth of their island nation.



Photos contributed by Luke Ovgard

Waitangi Beach looks like any other beach from a distance, but it holds deep significance to New Zealand.



The Maori ceremonial war canoes used at Waitangi for reenactments held on Waitangi Day can be up to 120 feet long and are always made from a single tree.

My Kiwi friend from college, David Clarke, was mortified and I was mortified. Once we realized the gravity of the situation, we hopped back in the kayaks and paddled like mad, making comically slow progress with the cheap plastic kayaks in light of our exhaustion and a powerful headwind.

The wind was blowing at 30 to 40 miles per hour, right in our faces, and it took us almost two hours to paddle the 3 miles or so back to

the beach from which we'd launched.

No police awaited us, and we assumed we'd made it away unscathed.

Once we landed, we decided to leave the kayaks on shore for a while and see the Bay of Islands and the collection of small towns therein.

## Wharf

We took a ferry to the town of Russell, where we grabbed lunch and fished

from the wharf there. David landed a fish the locals called a spot, while I landed my second species of the day, a jack mackerel.

Fishing was mediocre at best, so we grabbed take-away (to-go) fish and chips and made our way back to our hostel in Paihia.

Real food was too expensive for us, so we had another lunch of grilled frankfurters, mustard, and sauerkraut and washed it down with the Red Bull David's brother, New



All that work, risk and effort for a jack mackerel, one of the most common fish in New Zealand's waters.

Zealand's regional rep for the company, had loaded us up with then went to check out the Waitangi Treaty Grounds.

## Recognition

Though the museum was incredible and full of interesting history and Maori culture, perhaps the most exciting moment came when one of the employees recognized us as "the blokes with the kayaks."

Just as we began to die

of embarrassment, fear and shame, he started laughing and said "Sweet as, bro!" the Kiwi slang for "Awesome!"

We shared a laugh, finished the tour and I thanked God the trip down under didn't turn my world upside down.

Order performance fishing apparel or read more at [caughtovgard.com](http://caughtovgard.com); Follow on Instagram and Fishbrain @lukeovgard; Contact luke.ovgard@gmail.com.

## Interesting recipe gives Northern Blue Mountains unique presentation

By ETHAN SHAW  
For the East Oregonian

Every mountain range is different: looks different, feels different. It's a complicated recipe, after all, to cook one up and there are a lot of ingredients: molten and solid rock, water in all its forms, sunlight, wind, plants and more. And a dizzyingly long cooking time, mind you.

An interesting recipe gives Northeast Oregon and Southeast Washington's Northern Blue Mountains — that vaguely defined northwestern, windward range of the broader Blues — an interesting topographic presentation. They're less a conventional mountain range and more a great tableland (the "Blue Tablelands"). A dissected tableland, gnawed at and drilled into, leaving mesas and buttes and knife ridges overlooking breaks and canyons. Rugged, knee-buckling, axle-busting country, but possessed for the most part of a remarkably even skyline.

It's that roughly level, conifer-ruffled skyline, belying the tumbledown terrain below, that defines the range. Under twilight or starlight, this is land that can masquerade as a rolling, easy-to-walk plain. Try to walk it, though, straight out to that invitingly flattish horizon, and you'll quickly be disabused of the notion.

That's what you get with almost unbelievable quantities of basalt spewed out like molasses nearby, flood after flood of it, then upraised as a layer cake and exposed to the relentless,



Contributed photos by Ethan Shaw

Owsley Hogback overlooks the Meacham canyonlands area of the Northern Blue Mountains.



The Meacham canyonlands showcase the typical level horizon but majorly rough terrain of the Northern Blues.

no-hurry demolition work of weathering and erosion.

Up here, the Northern Blues climax into what (to my eye, anyhow) is spec-

tacular tableland scenery, dominated by the big Meacham-Umatilla breaks and the bigger Wenaha-Tucannon canyonlands, culmi-

nation of the range's relief and ruggedness. (These canyonland sections aren't unrelated to the fact that this stretch of the North-

ern Blues, downwind of the Columbia Gorge, gets a lot more precipitation than more southwesterly reaches, ramping up

stream-cutting muscle.)

These Blue Tablelands are their own kingdom, but also a kind of topographic segue: bridging the lower, softer basalt country of the Mid-Columbia Basin (whose bleak Yakima Fold Belt ridges mirror the upwarp of the Northern Blues) and the epic plunge of Hells Canyon as well as the higher subalpine and alpine ranges of the Blues to their south.

Folks from, say, the Colorado or the Canadian Rockies crossing I-84 might sneer at the Northern Blues (though, let's hope, not at the high Wallows or Elkhorns). Or maybe they just scratch their heads: "What exactly are these? Mountains? Plateaus? Pumped-up, mostly timbered badlands?"

Well, they are what they are: broken tableland, raked-open canyonland, black-timbered humpback summit, sunny ponderosa bench, long balsamroot ridge, Douglas-fir stringer draw, deadwood shrub-jungle gulch, golden ribbed hillslope, basalt-scarred breaks, dark woods and bright grassland, parched grassy flanks and lush canyon deeps and back-in-the-timber springs — and elk pasture, hunting ground, sheep driveway, skid road, and everywhere the ghost of fire.

Not everybody's idea of a mountainscape, sure. But, as Hemingway might say, "good country."

Ethan Shaw is a naturalist and freelance outdoors/nature writer who lives in Cove and spends as much time as possible in the backcountry.