

Glamour camping at Cape Palliser

Our intrepid Hawke's Bay correspondent, **Viv Haldane**, gets a taste of the new trend — glamping.

Words and images Vivienne Haldane



WHAT, WHERE, HOW

- Cape Palliser is two hours by road from Wellington city over the Rimutaka Hills.
- Seasons: Summer – 28 September to 5 May; winter – 5 May to 25 September.
- Price: Summer – \$250 for up to four people; winter – \$160 for up to four people; fully-catered glamping – \$55 per adult, per day (or \$28 per child under 12). Duncan and Sarah also offer multi-day self-guided walks and walkers' accommodation, along with the fully-catered food options. Their website – kawakawastationwalk.co.nz

I can count the number of times I've been camping on one hand. We aren't a camping family. But this is different. The bloke and I have come on a glamping (glamorous camping) trip to Kawakawa Station, at Cape Palliser on Waikapa's southwest coast.

Canopy Camping is the inspiration of university friends Liz Henderson and Sonia Mimaar. "We love the idea of camping with our families but neither of us wanted to invest in a camping kit and we have husbands who don't really enjoy sleeping on the ground," says Liz. "We like the idea of turning up and everything is there for you." I like this idea, too.

We are full of anticipation as we arrive at our campsite after a meandering drive through the Wairarapa from Hawke's Bay.

Unzipping the tent is like opening an exciting parcel and much to our delight, a stylish and homely interior is revealed.

There's a cosy-looking bed, complete with crochet patchwork quilt, piles of extra blankets,uton chairs, pretty burlings hang from the rafters, a woodstove (we'll need that), chairs and table, beer crates bookshelves filled with books and puzzles, a fluffy white rug... Need I go on?

"Smashing," says the bloke, as he squints closely to see how the tent is constructed. Then he heads off to check out the kitchen (fully equipped with everything you need), shower (better than the one at home), and toilet facilities, before setting the fire in anticipation of a cold evening.

Now we must conquer the hill adjacent to the tent. The bloke scrambles straight up, as suggested, then stands on the top with an "I told you so" look on his face as he points to an easier track going up the side of the hill. The writer just expires quietly. And yep, beyond lay hills, hills, and more hills. But it's worth it for the splendid bird's eye view we get of the campsite surrounded by manuka trees and the gentle shushing river.

In the distance we hear a quad bike and a red dot appears on the horizon, winding its way down the track. It's Duncan Furniss, who farms at Kawakawa Station. We introduce ourselves and he gives us details about how to use the campsite. He and his wife Sarah are Canopy Camping's hosts. They greet campers, offer guided walks over their property, and, if you want, they also provide an evening meal, so you

don't have to do much at all except relax and enjoy!

At Duncan's suggestion we gather up wine and nibbles and head to the sea, a few minutes away. Watching the sunset over the Kalkoura Range in the South Island is magic.

We sit on Pam's seat (a tribute to Duncan's mother Pam Furniss who passed away in 2011) and watch the light trails from aeroplanes as they drift across the pink sky. We try and guess where they have come from and where they're heading.

As seagulls dip and dive past us, the bloke mutters, "They're off to Wellington for a feed of fish and chips."

Our pre-cooked casserole is nearly as easy as takeaways, too. By now the woodstove is blazing, the tent is toasty warm, and our meal only requires heating and eating.

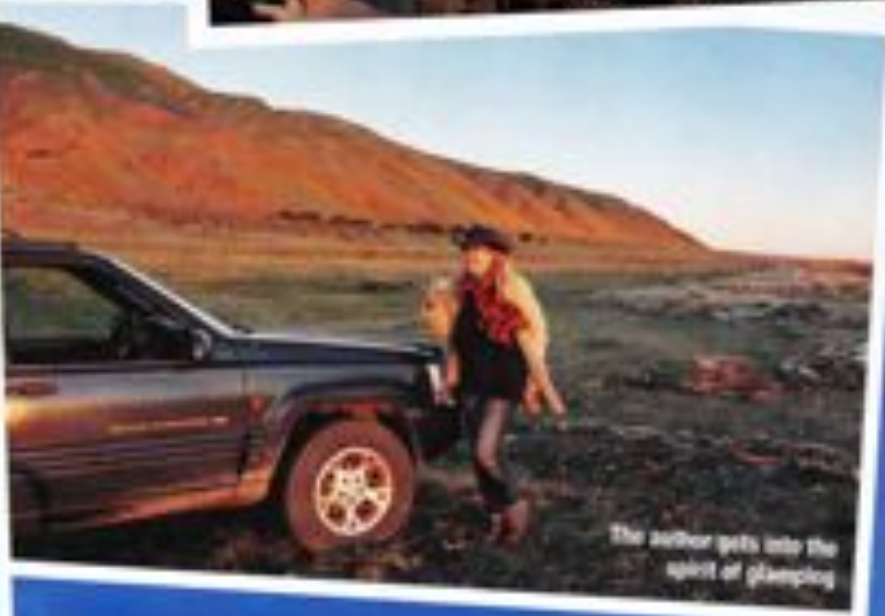
Surely nobody in his or her right mind would go camping in winter? Wrong. We were fearful of a frosty, shivery night and a frozen, startle hop to the ico but with plenty of blankets, a hottie or two, and a bloke who got up at 2am to put more wood on the 'manuka hot-pot', it was no problem!



Bob Buckley repairing his grader



Cape Palliser lighthouse



The author gets into the spirit of glamping


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OTHER ATTRACTIONS IN THE AREA

- Go Surfing: bring your surfboard. Ngawi is famous for its great surf.
- Children? Try swimming in the 'washpool': warm, safe, swimming hole just five minutes down the road in Mangatotoke.
- Visit the Stone Wall: a short walk or four-wheel drive to a waterfall and freshwater swimming hole.
- The seal colony at Cape Palliser.
- Further afield, visit Wairarapa's many vineyards or if you want some retail therapy, the towns of Martinborough, Featherston, Greytown, Carterton, and Masterton.
- Stonehenge Aotearoa: this open-sky observatory near Carterton is definitely worth a visit.



The twitter of birds accompanies the sunrise and soon the crisp air begins to thaw.

A day of exploration follows. We'd seen the bulldozers on the beach at Ngawi on Steve Logan's programme *Coasters* a few weeks ago, so we were looking forward to checking it out.

The tiny, picturesque fishing settlement just down the road from Kawakawa Station is renowned for its bountiful fishing grounds, as well as the collection of bulldozers still used for hauling boats in and out of the sea. Along the way, we meet a few colourful local characters.

Bob Buckley is spending a few hours tinkering on his bulldozer. "She's a great collection of bits," he says. "We can't use vehicles with regular tyres because it would be like driving on ball bearings. There aren't many places where you can put a dinghy into the tide and go and catch crayfish or blue cod."

He tells us we have certainly struck it lucky with the weather as it can't get rough on this coast.

The road to Cape Palliser lighthouse has been washed out, so we walk there instead. The orange and white

lighthouse, listed by the Lonely Planet guide as the 'tenth fastest in the world', appeared around the next bend and as we drew closer we could see the 250 nearly-vertical steps leading up to it.

It was first lit in 1897, ran on diesel after 1954, and switched to electricity in 1967. The last lighthouse keeper left in 1988 and now a computer in Wellington monitors it.

We meet a couple from Hamilton who are on a sightseeing trip to the area, some German tourists, and a Kiwi, home from Perth to remind himself what he is missing.

Back at the campsite, Sarah tells us the romantic story of how Duncan proposed to her on top of the lighthouse in 2008, having dressed up and prepared a champagne picnic for the occasion.

After all this energetic wandering, what better way than to relax than in an open-air bath? All it took was to light the gas underneath, then sit back and bask in the late afternoon sun as it warmed up.

The following morning we say our goodbyes to Sarah and her two young children, before heading off to check out the spectacular rock formation known as

The Putangirus Pinnacles. However, we decide to flag the three-hour walk (next time) and drive onto the Lake Ferry Hotel, famous for its fish and chips. We aren't disappointed. The quaint pub is obviously a popular stop-off point for tourists – that Sunday it was buzzing with activity.

Canopy Camping in winter was great but I imagine camping in summer would be even better. I envisage long summer evenings sitting outside with a glass of wine and a good book and being able to go to bed at twilight with the tent windows open.

Liz and Sonia plan to establish more Canopy Campsites around New Zealand. "We are talking to various interested landowners and plan to have about 30 sites eventually," says Liz.

Feedback from campers has so far been very positive. "It's an opportunity for people to get off the beaten track, and experience a piece of private land that they wouldn't otherwise see," she says. ☺

For more information visit
canopycamping.co.nz



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