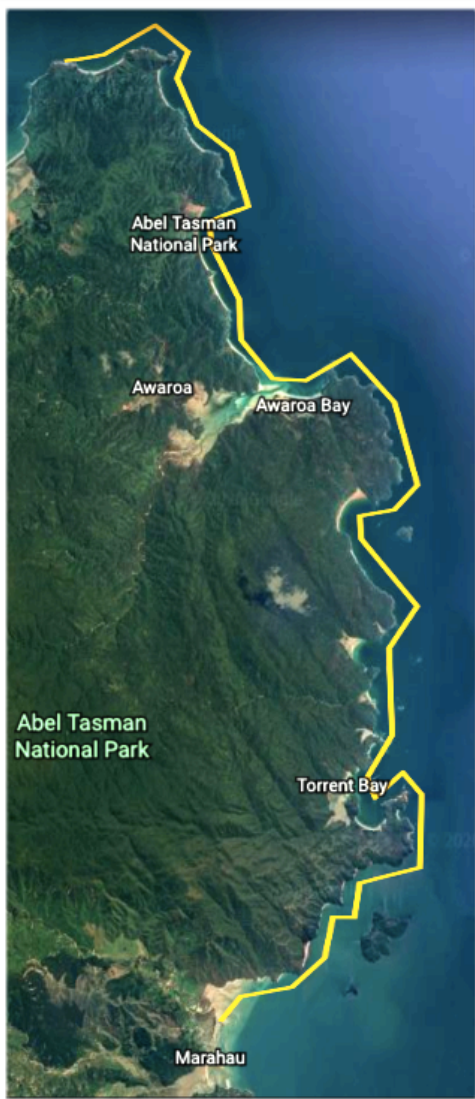


100km Paddle for a Cure

100km in one day to raise awareness and money for Multiple Sclerosis. One of the fastest growing diseases in North America.



On March 19th of 2020 at 4:17am I awoke to mentally prepare myself for what was about to be a 13 hour day of paddling on the water. I started at 5am and finished at 6pm that day. I set out with three goals in mind; to raise awareness for MS in support of my Mother who suffers from the disease and others like her, to challenge the fundraising ideas and lastly but most certainly not least, to create a scenario enabling me to feel for one day the pain I believe a person living with MS would feel every day. I was about to put my skills and experience to test by completing a 100km continuous coastal paddle.

This was the first time I would be tackling this wild 100km of ocean coastal paddling and the route of choice was based on logistics and preference. This coast is known by the Maori people as 'Te tai tapu', aka 'the sacred coast', which is why I felt it so fitting for such an occasion. The coastline excited me, and I knew there would be rescue options if required. My goal of 100km wasn't to prove anything to anyone other than myself; it was a distance I thought would be extremely challenging mentally and physically. Those living with MS struggle with mental and physical challenges daily. If any of you have sat in a kayak for a few hours (not to mention 13 hours) you will know that your toes and legs go numb, your fingers start tingling, and if not well distracted your sole focus becomes those pains – much similar to MS symptoms.

Another reason I wanted to do this, is to spark interest in others, to help promote others to get creative and support those



in need of it where they can. It doesn't have to be difficult or require a lot of planning. It just needs to raise awareness and funds. MS Canada names these 'Creative Challenges', something that is different from simply walking or running (not that simple for some), they promote something that is crazy and potentially unattainable.

Paddling a blue kayak along this coastline is a rarity; it would generate chit chat and gossip amongst the local people and tourists, asking questions such as 'Why is that person doing laps of the park', 'why hasn't she stopped'. My story of how I showed my support and commitment to the cause would travel quickly through whispers.



With our busy everyday lives and our fast paced society in which we find it hard to keep up with, without all the extra's, we find it hard to stop and think of those requiring our help, or ways in which we could help cure a cause. I don't think many of us take time to imagine how challenging it would be to have a disease without a cause.



The paddle was a lot easier than I thought. I mean, in all honesty, being stuck in a kayak is never easy for more than a few hours, not to mention 13 hours, but all in all it was a very enjoyable experience.

For months I thought it was unattainable. I had made the decision to do it on January 1st 2020 and to stop myself from pulling out last minute, I made it live on social media and created a GoFundMe account for the fundraiser, this kept me accountable. It helped me overcome my fears. I had chosen March 10th 2020 as it is the date of my Mother's birthday, however at the end of February I sustained a head injury (#10 for me) that put me on a week of bed rest and a slower recovery, I had to reschedule to March 28 th due to this and also my sister would be there who would finish the last few kilometres with me. On March 17th I found out I had to leave the country due to Covid-19, this meant that I had to decide in the next few days whether to do it or not. I knew I couldn't leave without completing the paddle and everything was telling me to do it, so I did. I completed it on Thursday 19 th March by 6pm. The weather aligned, it wasn't too cold, all gear in check, slight winds, sun, everything was perfect!





My body was fine, with minor pains and agitated muscles. It was a mental challenge and I was stronger than what I thought. When I reflect back on the paddle, I would describe it as a process, the moments and days leading up to it I truly believed I wasn't going to be able to make it or would give up half way through. However, as I began paddling, that disappeared. I fell into the motion of doing instead of thinking and not once did any of those negative thoughts come through. My thoughts were filled with gratitude and positivity; I was so lucky to have the chance to see this area of the coast and continually wondering what was around the next corner. After the halfway mark I started feeling like I had more and more energy, as if my mind took over my body. I didn't feel tired, I didn't hurt, I did however, have to pee constantly but knew that the more breaks I took the harder it would be. I pushed on. When I was completing the last 1-2 km I felt refreshed and quite emotional but mostly grateful for my life and my achievement, because the paddle in fact had nothing to do with me, it was a representation of the challenges and trials that a person with MS must face every single day. It taught me gratitude for my mobility and freedom to move.



NZ Fur Seal supporting me round the top.

Would I do it again, you ask? Absolutely and even further. I completed the goal distance, endured the struggle, but most importantly, brought attention to a disease that's close to my heart. I celebrated my mother and everything she has done, with every single stroke of that paddle. My mother is the strongest woman I know.



My hope is that others will feel inspired to think outside the box, be creative, be selfless and struggle if you must, show compassion and support to others.

To find out more about my story head to www.facebook.com/paddleforMS.



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