

# Beach Haven – The First Time I Ever saw This Place

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It was wartime and I had not long returned to New Zealand from Australia. After a few months I joined the Army and at the end of our training at Papakura, was stationed at North Head. In the meantime, my mother wrote telling me that she had bought a section with a tiny dwelling, in a remote Auckland suburb – Beach Haven. Where? Never heard of it.

Of course, being mother's only "chick" she was anxious for me to see her little hide-away as soon as possible. It was her semi-retirement den away from the busy life in Auckland. She enticed me to visit, telling me how pretty Beach Haven was, with plenty of fruit and a country store nearby. What more could a city-slicker daughter from Sydney require? Finally, my leave day from camp arrived and I was to travel up to see my mother.

Checking on transport to get me to this Pine and Strawberry haven, I found that the bus from North Head would take me to Devonport, where I would catch a ferry to Auckland, walk to the next wharf to get the ferry to Birkenhead and from there a bus would take me to Beach Haven. Or, alternatively, leaving from the steps further along the Auckland waterfront, a launch would take me directly to the Beach Haven wharf. All very simple, until one found that the timetables seemed to coincide, thereby missing either, meant missing both.

The day was beautiful and the harbour sparkled. Just the day to enjoy in a more country setting. Within an hour or so "mum" would be showing me around her new haven – I thought. But no – as the Devonport ferry sailed into Auckland I was but a captive passenger on board, witnessing the departure from the next wharf, of the ferry to Birkenhead. With slow duck-like dignity she floated from her berth, an audible hiss of "you've missed it, you've missed it" as the wake ruffled the blue water.

PANIC! (Remember there was no bridge in those days.) Ah, but there was still the Launch. So gathering strength and not waiting to be herded down the gangway I leapt, my only thought was to get to the launch before that too, had the laugh on me. I sprinted as never before and as I drew closer shouted "Wait on, wait on". Clutching my army hat and my haversack I landed safely at the Captain's feet and expressed my gratitude.

Getting my breath back, I settled down to enjoy the scenery all the way to Beach Haven. Calling at all the attractive little bays was delightful – until – "When will I reach Beach Haven?", I enquired. My heart went into my boots when the reply came, "Oh, we've just left it." Yes, the vessel with me aboard was now speeding its way towards Hobsonville.

By this time I had a lump in my throat. How would I get back? What could I do?

Common sense prevailed and I said that I would get off at Greenhithe and at least be on the right side of the harbour. The next call was Greenhithe and I was glad to step onto terra firma instead of zig-zagging around the upper harbour. A woman passenger also disembarked and went home but I stayed to try to work out what to do. I sat on a seat and gazed forlornly into the distance, towards Beach Haven. What now? My predicament seemed to have no solution from where I sat – but – those things that happen in "mysterious ways" come when we least expect it. There, some way out on the water was a figure in a dingy. My hopes soared. Could I attract attention to my plight?

"CooooEEeeee, CooooEEeeee" (in best Aussie fashion) "Ahoy, Ahoy, CoeeHeee". The

dot on the water became larger and clearer. Larger and clearer still, until within hearing distance, when I related my misfortune. The rower had no objection in rowing me back to Beach Haven. He manoeuvred his boat alongside the steps and said "Jump in". At last, I felt sure that I might see Beach Haven, at least in the not too distant future and was heading in the right direction. After rowing for some time we met up with the occupant of another dinghy, who was fishing. We passed the time of day with him and I was presented with two fish. Some time passed and I think not a little hard rowing for my unknown benefactor, before reaching the wharf at Beach Haven. With a cheery word and accepting nothing for his kindness, the boatman rowed away into the warm sunlight, leaving in his wake the memory of a deed well done. I stood a moment or two on the wharf and took in the scene. So this is Beach Haven, I thought. The little curved bay with erect young pines like sentinels standing over it and soft blue hills in another direction. Looking back towards where my journey had begun the harbour glistened in the sunlight. I knew how this scenery must have appealed to my mother's love of painting. Then walking on to find her cottage with my hat at a rakish angle, haversack slung over my shoulder, a fish dandling from each hand, shoes no longer shining with spit and polish, I ambled up a rough track between the pines and titree. At the top I reached the roadway, crossed and just a little further on went down a few steps leading to a shell path, bordered by hydrangeas and rambler roses.

At last, I had reached my destination. Fish and all, I was clasped to the bosom of a tearful parent, who, after all those hours was quite sure her only "chick" had deserted her, or come to some awful harm.

Of course, since that time my knowledge of the North Shore's geography has greatly improved – anyway, so that it couldn't happen again, they built a BRIDGE.