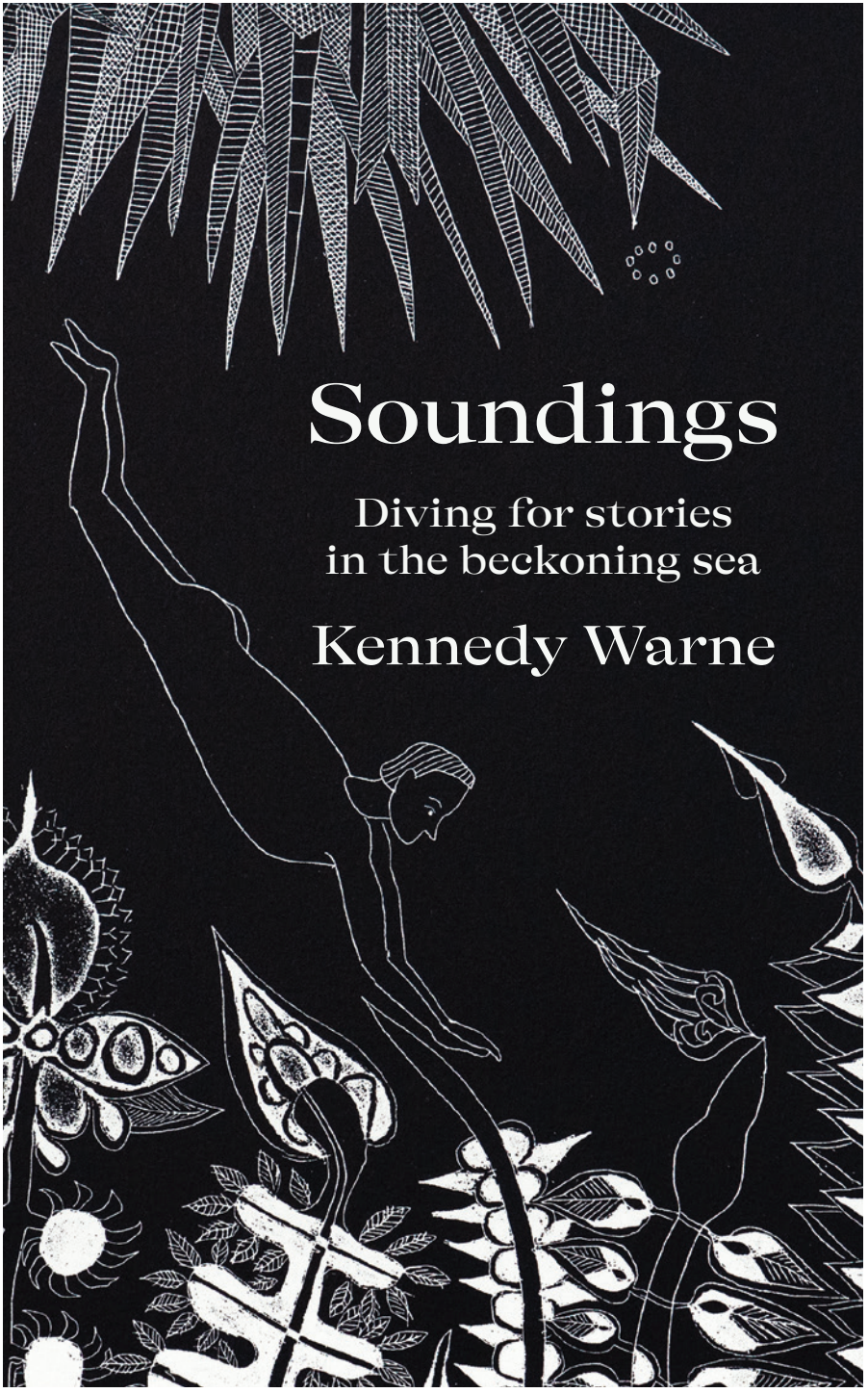
Soundings
Diving for stories
in the beckoning sea
Kennedy Warne

Soundings

For Bronwyn

Soundings

Diving for stories in the beckoning sea

Kennedy Warne

MASSEY UNIVERSITY PRESS

Loveliness unfathomable, as ever lover
saw in his young bride's eyes! — Tell
me not of thy teeth-tiered sharks, and
thy kidnapping cannibal ways. Let
faith oust fact; let fancy oust memory;
I look deep down and do believe.

— Starbuck's reverie,
Moby-Dick, Herman Melville

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Author's note

SOUNDINGS IS A MEMOIR of a life aquatic. It recounts my experiences partly above but mostly below the surface. I have been visiting and exploring the underwater world for 50 years. Much of this exploration has occurred on assignment for *National Geographic*. The chapters on South Africa, the Okavango Delta, Arabia, Kiribati and Tuvalu, the Philippines, harp seals and sharks expand on stories initially published in *National Geographic*. The introduction and part of the first chapter draw from pieces published in *New Zealand Geographic*.

My experiences among mangrove forests are not included in this book; they are the subject of my 2011 book *Let Them Eat Shrimp: The Tragic Disappearance of the Rainforests of the Sea*. Encounters with albatrosses and with New Zealand's marine reserves are also either absent or only glancingly referred to here, as they form chapters in my 2008 book *Roads Less Travelled*: *Twenty Years of Exploration with New Zealand Geographic*.

It is perhaps worth mentioning that *New Zealand Geographic* and *National Geographic* are not related, other than

by the generic word 'geographic' in their titles. (There is also an *Australian Geographic* and a *Canadian Geographic*.) It was my good fortune to co-found *New Zealand Geographic* in 1988 and to serve as the magazine's editor for 15 years. That experience taught me about writing, photography, design and production. In 1999, it opened the door to write for *National Geographic*. I have been writing for both magazines ever since.

Reflecting on the aquatic stories I have worked on over the past two decades brings pleasurable memories of people who helped make the research possible or who contributed their knowledge, skill and enthusiasm in the field. In South Africa, I think of Mark and Gail Addison, Charles Maxwell, Eric Simpson, Ryan Daly and Clare Keating, Peet Joubert, Lauren De Vos, Steve Benjamin and Jackie Sunde. In the Okavango Delta, Brad Bestelink, Andy Crawford, and Brad's father, PJ, come readily to mind. In the Seychelles, Michael Scholl, Rainer von Brandis and Nancy Bunbury. In Kuwait, Dareen Almojil. In Oman, Andy Wilson and Ahmed Salem. In Kiribati, Teweiariki Teaero and Claire Anterea. In New Zealand, Ruth and Lance Shaw and Bill Ballantine, who is rightly referred to as the father of New Zealand marine reserves

For a marine education, I owe much to University of Auckland professors John Morton and Patricia Bergquist, freelance writer and naturalist John Walsby and my former cell biology lecturer Warren Judd. Warren later joined me as deputy editor of *New Zealand Geographic*, and took over as editor when I stepped down in 2004. Irrepressibly inquisitive about the natural world, he was my editorial collaborator from the magazine's very first issue.

For the journalistic pathway that created these opportunities, I thank John Woods, with whom I first started

working in 1980 on the community newspaper he launched in Thames, the *Hauraki Herald*. I learned my craft on the job. John and I launched *New Zealand Geographic* eight years later.

I value the opportunities I have had to work with *National Geographic* photographers over the past two decades: David Doubilet and Jennifer Hayes in South Africa, the Okavango Delta and the Philippines, Brian Skerry in the Gulf of St Lawrence and New Zealand, and Thomas Peschak in South Africa, the Seychelles and Arabia.

Among the editors I worked with at *National Geographic* are John Hoeffel, Lynn Addison and, for the longest time, Oliver Payne, who offered me my first assignment, and many to follow.

It was Tracey Borgfeldt, associate publisher at Massey University Press, who suggested I write this book. Our paths first crossed in 1995 when she shepherded to publication the large-format book *New Zealand Geographic,* showcasing photographs and stories from the first five years of *New Zealand Geographic* magazine. We stayed in touch, and the book you have in your hands has been brought to fruition by her, publisher Nicola Legat and the Massey University Press team.

I will be forever thankful to my father for instilling in me a love of the sea. One of my earliest memories is of him carrying a red-painted dinghy down a muddy track to the sea from the family bach at Whangaparāoa. He carried it on his back, turtle fashion, and that is how I have carried dinghies ever since I was strong enough to lift them. A memory from teenage years is of getting up before dawn during summer holidays at Russell, hoping with youthful fervour that the weather would be suitable for fishing. Dad would be standing outside in the waning darkness, studying the clouds overhead to discern the

wind strength. If the clouds were scudding too fast there would be no boating for us that day. But on days when the clouds were sluggish we would launch his runabout and head out to the Bay of Islands in search of snapper, kahawai and gurnard. I am a saltwater person because of him, and I hope always to be one. As Keri Hulme wrote, 'the sea has all our dreams.'

Introduction

The sounding of the whale

IN THE OPENING SCENE of Jacques Cousteau's first feature film, *The Silent World*, seven divers, each holding aloft a torch of blazing phosphorus, descend into the deep. The camera follows them down, tracking through the bubbles of hot gas that swell and rise like white mushroom caps to the surface. On the seafloor, 50 metres down, the divers fan out to explore and film a coral reef. Over the Darth Vader rasp of their breathing comes the voice of the narrator: 'These divers, wearing the compressed-air aqualung, are true spacemen, swimming free as fish.'

Cousteau released *The Silent World* in 1956, the year I was born. Over the next four decades, his movies and television documentaries would make him a household name, his adenoidal French accent as familiar in his day as David Attenborough's breathless British whisper is in ours.

Cousteau was 26 when he first pulled on a pair of goggles and dived into the Mediterranean. Of that experience he wrote: 'Sometimes we are lucky enough to know that our lives have been changed, to discard the old, embrace the new, and run headlong down an immutable course. It happened to me on that summer's day, when my eyes were opened on the sea.'

Cousteau's motto was 'Il faut aller voir', 'One must go and see'. Where he went and what he saw inspired millions to follow, and I was one. My own early glimpses of the undersea world were as a teenager at Tawharanui, a curving finger of land that juts into the Hauraki Gulf north of Kawau Island. On a lungful of air I became an explorer in a forest of kelp with sea urchins grazing at their bases and mullet gliding between their trunks. Under the canopy of fronds the light was dim and golden. The sense of mystery and adventure was palpable.

Until I had to come up for another breath.

But then came scuba — the euphonious acronym for 'self-contained underwater breathing apparatus' — and with it the freedom Cousteau described after his first dive with an aqualung, in 1943: 'From this day forward we would swim across miles of country no man had known, free and level, with our flesh feeling what the fish scales know.'

Flying without wings, Cousteau called it. And such flights! Scuba has opened worlds beyond imagination. I have dived with harp seals in the frozen Gulf of St Lawrence, surfacing into a sea-ice slush that stung my face like needles. I hand-fed grey nurse sharks off the coast of South Africa, and once, far offshore in the Indian Ocean, where the swells reared up like mountain ranges and dolphins surfed down their faces, I leaped into the limitless blue to witness sperm whales passing.

In Belize I bobbed among a kaleidoscope of creatures encrusting the roots of mangrove trees that dangled and danced in the tide. In the Sulu Sea, in the Philippines, I turned a slow enraptured somersault as an oceanic manta ray glided above me, and in the Okavango Delta I floated with baby crocodiles in a garden of water lilies and freshwater algae.

In New Zealand's Poor Knights, an undersea canyonland of

caverns and arches that Cousteau himself visited and declared to be one of the best dive sites in the world, I once surfaced in an underwater cave and took my scuba regulator out of my mouth to breathe fresh air 10 metres under the sea. In Fiordland I explored an emerald-tinted world of strawberry sea squirts, black coral trees and pink sea pens, the ocean's living quills.

It seems remarkable that human beings started exploring space at the same time that they began diving beneath the seas of our own planet. (Sputnik was launched the year after Cousteau made *The Silent World*.) The two realms are often compared, and correctly so. In both environments a person is weightless and needs a portable air supply. And though the undersea world is far from silent, it is often a place of profound and soothing quietude.

But it is the otherness, the alienness, the sense of venturing into the unknown that is the most telling comparison. I know no other activity in which one so completely steps through the wardrobe of the familiar into a Narnia of strange sights and even stranger creatures. One moment you are an earthling, tethered to the terrestrial; the next you are, as Cousteau put it, an archangel.

It can indeed be heavenly down under. Some might even go so far as to exclaim, like Narnia's unicorn: 'This is my real country! I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now.'

As with the exploration of outer space, humans have tried to extend their visitations to the deep. Cousteau sent his 'oceanauts' to live in experimental stations on the seafloor, once for three weeks at 100 metres. (Their biggest problem at that depth was that their champagne went flat.) But short of

growing gills, our sojourns in the undersea country will always be that; temporary. The important thing, as Cousteau and his torch-bearing spacemen showed, is to go and see for oneself. To go and see and have one's eyes opened.

This has been my experience, first as a child tasting adventure, later as a student studying for a degree in marine zoology, and then as a writer for *New Zealand Geographic* and *National Geographic*. I like to think I have been taking soundings — a traditional nautical term for the act of determining the depth of water, but also a phrase that has come to mean testing ideas and seeking knowledge.

Whales also sound, when they forsake the surface for the deep. I find it a beguiling thought that our big-brained kin, possessing a social intelligence we can scarcely begin to imagine, are sounding their world and probing its depths.

On my desk as I write these words lies a curiously shaped piece of bone, ivory-coloured and pitted all over its surface. It is about the size of a large potato and fits comfortably into my hand, so that my fingers can curl partly around it. The underside is flattened and split by an opening into its hollow interior. It belonged to my Canadian great-uncle, who in old age came to live with his daughter and her family in Auckland. He was a shell collector. I was a young boy who had started to collect shells, and he gave me several ornate specimens to enlarge my collection. He also gave me this: the eardrum of a sperm whale.

If I hold the opening to my ear, as one would do with a triton shell or a conch, I can hear the sea. I am holding it now, typing with one hand. I am listening with my human ear, through the ear of one of the most legendary of sea creatures, to the sound of the ocean from which all life came.

Were I to trace the whakapapa of this eardrum back far enough in time, I would find something startling: the ancestors of whales lived on land. For millions of years, they were land mammals, like us. Then they returned to the sea. In a way, divers follow them back.

Cousteau said he often felt a trespasser in the sea. It seems an odd word for him to use. Trespass suggests transgression, entry without permission. I do not feel like a trespasser when I descend into the sea. Perhaps a foreigner, someone who has come to another country and is still learning its language and its ways. It may take a lifetime to learn, and then only imperfectly. Increasingly, however, that country begins to feels like home.

A life aquatic

I UNLOCK THE CHAIN THAT tethers the dinghy to a pōhutukawa root on the Russell esplanade and pull the little boat down over the smooth, rattling pebbles of the beach towards the water. I have known this beach for more than half a century. I skimmed its chocolate-coloured pebbles across the water when I was a child and have watched my own grandchildren do the same. I used to 'bake' my children in an umu made by heaping these sun-warmed stones on their bodies until only their mouths and nostrils showed. They would lie still until the heat or the claustrophobia got to them, then rise up like Lazarus, stones falling from their limbs, and dive into the sea.

It is autumn now, and my father is with me. We carry a chilly bin and food box, bedding, overnight bags, tools and paraphernalia down the steep beach to the dinghy. I take the oars and Dad pushes us off, manoeuvring his weak leg slowly over the transom and in. He had a hip replacement a few years ago. I'm in line for the same surgery. Like father, like son. I hope I do as well as he does at 92.

I row out to a white-hulled launch moored 50 metres off the beach, lift one of the oars from its rowlock and steady the

dinghy against the stern. Dad steps onto the duckboard — not an original feature of the boat but one that makes life easier for everyone — and unzips the awning.

There are rituals in all facets of boating, and the moment of entry is one. I fish for the keys in a pot of clothes pegs and unlock the varnished kauri doors that open to the saloon. The interior is cool and dim. There are only eight small portholes and two sets of skylights to allow light to enter — not like modern launches with their capacious windows. But we like the den-like feeling of enclosure. It's how boats were designed in the era when *Marline* was built.

We stow our stores and belongings, switch on the batteries and start the engine. I walk up on deck to cast off the mooring rope, and give a mental farewell to Russell's waterfront: the Duke of Marlborough hotel, the Four Square grocery store, the swordfish club, a clutch of houses and restaurants, historic Pompallier House, a long row of pōhutukawa overtowered by a single massive Moreton Bay fig tree. All this I have known from childhood, and most of it my father has known from his childhood. He was born here.

His father, Leon, had come to the Bay of Islands after returning from World War I. He met my grandmother, Phyllis, in Whangārei Hospital, where she nursed him as he recovered from shrapnel injuries. Leon had trained as a boatbuilder in St Marys Bay in central Auckland before the war. In the 1920s he and his brother George, a marine engineer, established a boatbuilding business at Matauwhi Bay, at the entrance to Russell, and lived in adjacent houses a few hundred metres up the road. Their boatshed is still standing, now converted into clubrooms for the Russell Boating Club. George's bungalow is also standing, owned by my father and mother as a holiday

home. Leon's house burned down some time after he had retired and moved back to St Marys Bay in 1941.

When Leon and George arrived in the bay, big-game fishing in New Zealand was in its infancy. That would change rapidly when Zane Grey, an American sportfisherman and writer of pulp westerns, came to New Zealand in 1926 to catch marlin, mako sharks, yellowtail kingfish and whatever else he could hook as he trolled in the Bay of Islands and along the Northland coast from the Poor Knights to Whangaroa. The book he published about his fishing exploits (including trout fishing around Taupō) helped establish New Zealand as 'the angler's El Dorado'.

Grey hired two local skippers to take him and his buddy Captain Laurie Mitchell fishing. Grey fished from Francis Arlidge's launch, *Alma G*; Mitchell fished with my grandfather from his launch, *Marlin*. Almost a hundred years later, Dad and I are following in their wake.

We idle past the historic Russell wharf, with its crane for weighing the big fish that come in on the game-fishing boats. When I was a boy, it was a summer ritual to walk to the wharf in the late afternoon, count the triangular flags fluttering from the flagpole, showing which fish had been caught that day, and then watch them being winched up from the transoms of the fishing launches and weighed. Weigh-ins are rare today. Most of the striped marlin hooked by anglers are tagged and released. A fish is kept if the angler thinks it may be a record, or if it is early in the season, when freezers are empty and palates are craving the taste of smoked marlin.

More than ninety per cent of the game fish caught in New Zealand are striped marlin. For some reason, perhaps because we're on the edge of the striper's geographical range, we get

the big fish — the ones that have the muscle to travel farthest. Sixteen of the 22 line-class world records for striped marlin are for fish caught in New Zealand waters, including the all-tackle world record of 224 kilograms, caught off the Tūtūkākā coast in 1986.

The other species of marlin that was common in my grandfather's day, but is almost never encountered today, is the black marlin. Black marlins were monsters. They were the big prize for an angler, or swordfishermen as they were called back then. Swordfishing, however, is a misnomer. The true swordfish, effusively described as the 'gladiator of the deep', 'the animated torpedo of the Seven Seas' and 'the greatest fighting fish in the world', is eagerly sought but rarely caught by New Zealand anglers. The swordfish earns its name from the fact that its bill, which can reach up to half the length of its body, is flattened like a broadsword, whereas marlin bills are round, like a spear. Very few swordfish (or broadbills, as they are usually referred to today) were caught here until the late 1980s, when specialised techniques such as drift fishing at night with chemical lightsticks were used to target them.

The publication of Grey's book led to an influx of anglers to the Bay of Islands. Leon and George found they could make a living building boats in the winter and taking clients big-game fishing in the summer, a seasonal division of labour that has always struck me as an enviable combination. Their names feature regularly on the catch boards that have pride of place in the Russell swordfish club: varnished kauri panels engraved with the names of anglers, boats, skippers and the weight of the fish they landed.

In the early years of big-game fishing, catches were quoted in cumulative poundage, as if fish were timber trees

to be measured in board feet. One Bay of Islands angler, an Englishman by the name of White-Wickham, reported catching 3087 pounds in 19 days' fishing in 1922 and 4924 pounds over 30 days in 1926/27. Such catches are unrepeatable today. The big fish simply aren't there.

Dad gives *Marline* some throttle and her bow lifts a few centimetres, the equivalent, I suppose, of raising her chin. Like many launches of *Marline*'s vintage, she has a displacement hull, heavy and rounded, and this design governs her speed. We cruise at a stately 7 knots.

Marline was Leon's last launch. Kauri from cabin top to keelson, she was built in 1949 in Leon's boatshed in St Marys Bay, just a few dozen metres from his house. Dad remembers helping out in the shed. One of his jobs was to hold the dolly, a piece of lead that was used to provide resistance when driving copper nails through the hull planks into the ribs. The holder was inside the boat while the hammerer was outside. It required concentration to hold the dolly at precisely the spot where the rivet was being driven, so that it would penetrate cleanly. Dad remembers his father calling out, 'You're not on it! You're not on it!'

Leon sold *Marline* a few years after he built her. The foreshore in front of his property was being reclaimed in preparation for building the Auckland Harbour Bridge and Westhaven marina. No longer able to row out to his boat on her mooring, he decided not to keep her.

Marline was out of the family for 30 years, much of it in Tauranga, where she was used in big-game fishing around Tūhua Mayor Island. It was a sheer fluke that my father, driving

across Panmure bridge in east Auckland, happened to glance down at the boats moored in the Tāmaki River and thought that one of them looked familiar. It was *Marline*, somewhat altered but still recognisable, and in 1986 he was able to buy her back. It was a happy day when we motored into Russell for the first time, restoring a nautical connection: a Warne boat in the bay once more.

Now we are taking *Marline* back to Auckland, her winter home. We pass familiar landmarks as we leave the bay: the white flagpole at Waitangi across the water; the inlet that runs up to Kerikeri; the Black Rocks, one of which has the shape of a battleship; and the Ninepin, a triangular fin of rock that was a reliable spot for catching kahawai, which congregate around such pinnacles.

As we approach Tāpeka Point, the tip of the Russell Peninsula, we feel the lift of the ocean swell — always a thrilling first taste of the voyage to come. We round the point and take the inside route, between the islands and mainland, towards Cape Brett. In calm weather we sometimes take the more direct outside route, past Red Head, the tip of the outermost island, but the inside passage is so full of memories, of fishing and picnicking and overnighting in secluded bays, that we prefer it. I think of the many times I paddled my kayak here from Russell, beached it on a sandbar and snorkelled for scallops.

At Urupukapuka, the largest of the islands, we anchor in historic Otehei Bay, and it feels like a homecoming. This was the bay where Grey, Mitchell, Arlidge, my grandfather and their boatmen based themselves for the three months of Grey's fishing trip. Grey chose Otehei Bay because he wanted a camp all to himself. He could have gone to Deep Water Cove, an

established anglers' base a few kilometres towards Cape Brett, but that would have meant fraternising with other anglers, and that was not his style. He liked to run his 'outfit', as he called it, in his own way. So he leased a few acres and set up camp.

It was to be my grandfather's first and last fishing season with Grey. In an interview for the *New Zealand Weekly News* in 1971 he said, 'I was with him one year and then I fell out with him. Unfortunately I don't know quite how it happened. He had written an article for the *New Zealand Herald* and something in it was not quite right. I told him so and after this I was not too popular.'

That 'something' was probably Grey's claim that the locals were Philistines when it came to angling technique. He dismissed his hosts as 'mere novices at the game . . . with no realisation whatever of this grandest of sport'. Wrote Grey: 'The New Zealand angler, when he got a bite, merely held his rod up and let the boatman run the boat in the direction the fish wanted to go. He did not strike the fish hard, as we do. He did not bend the rod, or pump the fish hard as we do. He followed the fish out to sea, and several hours later returned with or without the fish, mostly without.'

It must have cut the egotistical Grey to the bone that during that fishing season it was his sidekick, Captain Mitchell (an assumed title — Mitchell was neither a military nor a boating captain), who caught a world-record 976-pound (443 kilogram) black marlin from Leon's launch.

'I don't think I'll ever recover from the sight of that fish and my miserable misfortune,' Grey wrote to his long-suffering wife, Dolly. Miserable misfortune? Grey had been hauling in marlins and mako sharks hand over fist. Two days before Mitchell's triumph, Grey had landed the first broadbill to be

caught on rod and reel in New Zealand waters.

Yet in *Tales of the Angler's Eldorado* he lays on his misery with a trowel. 'What a fish!' he writes. 'I, who had loved fish from earliest boyhood, hung round that Marlin absorbed, obsessed, entranced and sick with the deferred possibility of catching one like it for myself. How silly such hope! Could I ever expect such marvellous good luck? . . . Oh the madness of a fisherman! The strange something that is born, not made!'

Mitchell's fish was indeed a monster. A hand-coloured photograph shows the fish hanging by its tail from a tripod of wooden poles on the beach at Otehei Bay. Mitchell stands next to it, wearing his trademark cheesecutter cap, buttoned-up shirt and waistcoat, every inch the British sportsman Grey makes him out to be (though he was actually Canadian). The pectoral fin is at chest height, while the tip of the bill is almost touching the sand. The fish was close to 4 metres long, and the bill was 'as thick as a spade handle at the point', wrote Grey.

The *New Zealand Herald* conjectured that had the marlin been weighed when caught it would likely have passed the 1000-pound (453 kilogram) mark. Mitchell had landed the fish 10 miles off the Cavalli Islands, which lie between the Bay of Islands and Whangaroa Harbour, and did not get back to the Urupukapuka camp until evening. The fish, hoisted on the tripod and left there overnight, disgorged seven snapper. Even thus lightened, it was unweighable: the scales at Russell had a 600-pound limit. The fish had to be cut into three pieces. Noted the *Herald*: 'It was no easy job but a butcher with a saw finally settled it under the superintendence of the fishing club secretary, with a well-known Auckland medical man giving occasional advice from the standpoint of the surgeon.'

I row ashore and walk to the spot where, near as I can figure

it, the tripod stood. Pop music blares from the restaurant of the current incarnation of the Zane Grey Sporting Club, renamed the Otehei Bay Resort. Most of the original buildings burned to the ground in 1972, but the same layout of cabins and a central dining room has been retained in the new lodge.

I watch a stingray glide under the wharf, a black diamond on the pale sand. For several years a semi-submersible vessel operated here as a tourism venture, offering visitors the chance to eyeball snapper and reef fish without having to don a mask and flippers. That venture ended and was replaced by dolphin-watching catamarans of ever-increasing size. Now dolphins are a rare sight in the bay, perhaps driven off by all the attention they were receiving, and dolphin watching is no longer a tourism offering.

Their absence, like that of the billfish, feels personal. So often when we were motoring in the bay a pod of bottlenose dolphins would ride *Marline*'s bow wave to the delight of everyone on board. There would be a rush to the bow to watch them twist and turn, peel off and then swim back, rolling on to their sides to watch the humans watching them.

New regulations now limit boat speed to five knots in certain parts of the bay, and prohibit approaching or swimming with dolphins, in the hope that they will return. Humans, it seems, must always be in the position of rectifying damage rather than preventing or avoiding it.

We leave Urupukapuka and weave between the rocks of the Albert Channel, past Hope Reef and into deeper water that is inky black, rather than blue-green. The water looks 'fishy', my father says. I let out trolling lines and we make

a few circuits around Mahenotapuku Bird Rock, a guano-frosted slab where gannets occupy the upper storeys and gulls the ground-floor roosts. In Leon's day, the stretch between here and Cape Brett was 'marlin alley'. I can't begin to calculate how many lines and trolled baits have cut these waters, how many sharks and billfish were taken.

I find it hard to imagine Grey, Mitchell and others like them wanting to catch those magnificent fish every day for months on end. It was a kind of craving, an addiction. Grey considered himself incurable, a martyr to rod and reel.

We pick up a couple of kahawai on lures and head for Cape Brett. Soon the lighthouse comes into view, a dazzling white tower on a steep grassy slope. The light has shone here for over 100 years, initially kerosene-powered, now solar. An early keeper, Robert Wilson, used his time off to go after game fish from a 12-foot rowboat. On one occasion he hooked a mako and was towed half a mile out to sea. After bringing the animal to the side of the boat he gripped the trace with his hand to keep the shark's mouth hard up against the gunwale while the tail thrashed the sea to a froth. Wilson's gloveless hand dripped blood from cuts made by the wire leader.

In a hook of sheltered water back from the cape, Dad brings *Marline* close to the cliffs and reminisces about the day in 1951 when he was at this same spot, in the same boat, with Leon. They'd had a hard, luckless morning trolling in rough seas, and came in here for respite from the weather while they had a bite of lunch. The lines were left out on the outriggers, the kahawai baits dangling straight down in the water. Father and son were in the saloon, having a cuppa.

'One of the reels went *tick*, *tick*, *tick*, and the line came off the outrigger peg,' Dad recalls. 'The old man went out to have a

look. He felt the line for a minute, and said, "Probably snapper nibbling the bait." A few minutes later it happened again. *Tick, tick, tick*. Then the reel screamed, and I jumped up and went for the rod, belting my head on the door frame and nearly knocking myself out.' The nibbling snapper turned out to be a striped marlin — a pinfish, no less, the heaviest caught in the season. My father still rubs his forehead tenderly at the memory of the splitting headache he had while he fought that fish.

We head towards the cape, a passage we always approach with respect for the combinations of wind and tide that make it unpredictable. We've been here on windless days when oily swells sucked at the weed on the Cape Brett rocks and the tidal race eddied the dark water. And we've felt the teeth of northeast gales, when *Marline*'s round-bilged hull rolled drunkenly through alarming arcs, tipping charts and rods off their shelves in the saloon. Today we have calm seas and an entourage of dolphins and pseudorca, a species related to pilot whales, leading us through the gap between the cape and Motukōkako Piercy Island with its famous 'hole in the rock'.

The cliffs of the cape are scarred battlements that have endured the battering ram of the sea. I've seen these blackened ramparts covered with what looked like snowflakes but showed through binoculars to be a rabble of roosting gulls, made miniature by the scale of the rock. Grizzled pōhutukawa cling to the clifftops, many stripped to staghorn skeletons by possum browsing, but others flushed with fresh growth thanks to a pest eradication programme. Boatmen in Leon's day used to shoot goats off the cliffs from their launches and pick up the carcasses from the sea.

We see a few game-fishing boats creeping along the horizon at the 200-metre contour where the water changes