DESTINATION: KENNEDY BAY, COLVILLE AND THE WILD NORTH

DRIVING NORTH? There are no shops nor petrol stations in this northern region, beyond the town of Colville on the west side. Check road conditions and be prepared with enough petrol, supplies, food, and water. You will encounter mostly unsealed roads, and some may be under repair. Many of the roads you can preview by ‘driving’ on Google Maps, and even there we encountered road repair crews.

Rental cars may not be allowed on these roads. You may want to just park your car and let our guest photographer, Willie Lockore of Coromandel Adventures, drive you north. Sit back, get a narrated history of the area, and fully enjoy the breathtaking scenery.

Campgrounds and motor parks range from fully powered spots to “water only available from creek”. Wifi and phone important? Check availability. Of course, one can find baches for hire, and a variety of accommodation options from hostel beds to retreat facilities, motel rooms to campsites.

Surfers will want to visit the east side bays, while fishing charters and motor lodges are available on the peninsula’s west side along Colville Road. Inland, just south of Port Charles, the Tangiaro Kiwi Retreat offers lodging and a café. Search online, you will find plenty of resources.

Note: Depending on the geographic area unsealed roads can be gravel (sometimes called “loose metal”), clay or pumice. These roads tend to be minor roads in rural areas. Caution is advised.

The Kennedy Bay Road drive, vista point and beach

From the Driving Creek Railway, you can head east to Kennedy Bay, originally called Harataunga. Driving Creek Road becomes Kennedy Bay Road, leading to this relatively remote northern bay along the east coast. At the crest of this unsealed road is Tokatea Hill and its spectacular viewpoint. Coromandel Town to the bay is about 15km (much unsealed), perhaps a 20 minute drive.

Kennedy Bay is a non-commercial area (hint, bring it all with you!). To access Kennedy Bay’s beach, take Beach Road (the left of two identical unsealed roads) located about 500 feet south of the estuary bridge. The right road leads to beachfront bach rental, Pukeko Retreat.

Down Beach Road find a flat beach for fishing, beach boat launching, and other water sports. Standing paddle boards and kayaks are for hire from K Bay Kayak and Paddle Board Hire. Find holiday baches and campsgrounds, and in the swampy grassland areas, you might just see the stunning blue and black pukeko or dolphins frolicking in the surf! Sunrise from the beach? “Paradise!”

Lady kayakers from a K Bay Kayak and Paddle Board Hire paddle explore Kennedy Bay estuary, looking south at the mighty Konake Hill. In summer, Amanda Forsyth leads a fortnightly kayak paddle for the local gals, “just to get them out there having some fun and exercise while enjoying our own backyard. This helps get the community together, even the dolphins!” She has also started a local “family paddle” to involve the kids.

Rental rates are affordable, and Amanda will suggest options for all abilities. She even leads long distance paddles to such places as New Chum. Check out her Facebook page for photos.

To reserve DOC campsites & learn about road/weather conditions: www.doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/places-to-stay/conservation-campsites-by-region/

KENNEDY BAY TODAY: STILL ANCESTRAL LAND

The Kennedy Bay area on the east coast (Maori name Harataunga) is not commercially developed, but it has a few houses, farms and holiday rentals.

Tread respectfully, the residents here consider the land ancestral, and some may well be descendants of kauri merchant John Kennedy and his Maori wife, Rangirauwaka. John Kennedy was an early colonist (arrived aboard the HMS Buffalo) and kauri merchant who was robbed and killed aboard his boat in 1846. (See “Early Wood” story pages 12 and 14)

Harataunga is the largest area of Maori land in Hauraki. Land ownership, water rights, and tribal/crown issues and treaties (some predating even European arrival) continue to play out right till the present day. The marae, opened in 1996, is located on Kennedy Bay Road across from the fire station. It has a red roof and carved gateway. The stunning beam carvings are by the late Pakariki Harrison, seen in this photo from his biography on www.thearts.co.nz.

Pakariki Harrison (left) carved the pillars of the Maori Marae. The stunning ceiling was painted by the recently departed John Hovell.