

I've been playing this addictive game for three years ever since Joanne/Rainbow Chaser, introduced me to it, via a post on the pilot's website "ppruner.org". There is quite an active flotilla of "PPRuNer's" that will have a PRU prefix on their vessel's name for major races. My vessel's name "Miss_Saigon" and her Vietnamese flag, reflects the fact that I was living and working in Saigon when I first started racing.

I mentioned to Joanne that I had actually visited White Island and she suggested I should do a write-up.

The White Island Race (and any NZ race) is always interesting to me, because it is an area I know quite well. Besides visiting White Island, I've sailed in the Bay of Plenty and in the Auckland area (and flown over it), and kayaked in Cathedral Cove on the Coromandel Peninsula.

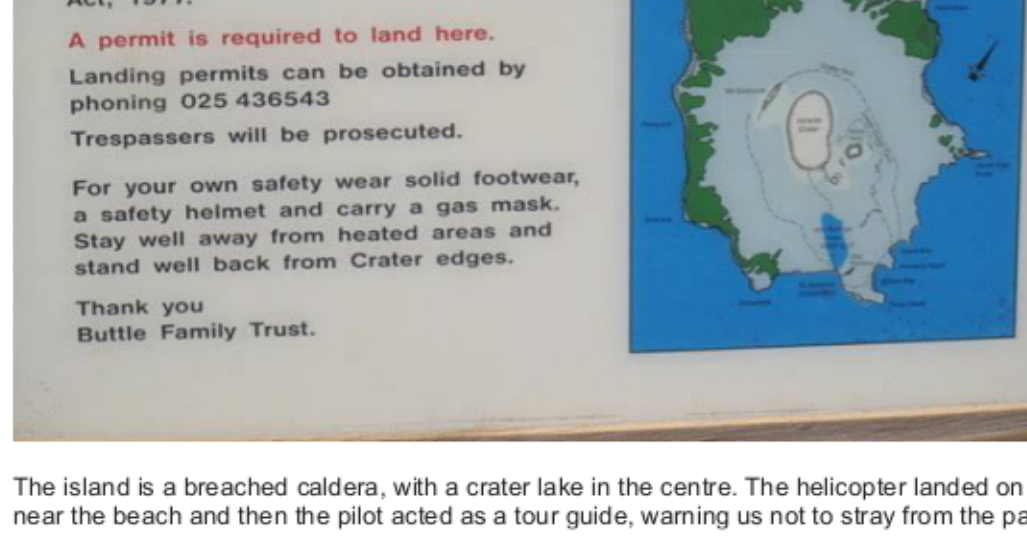
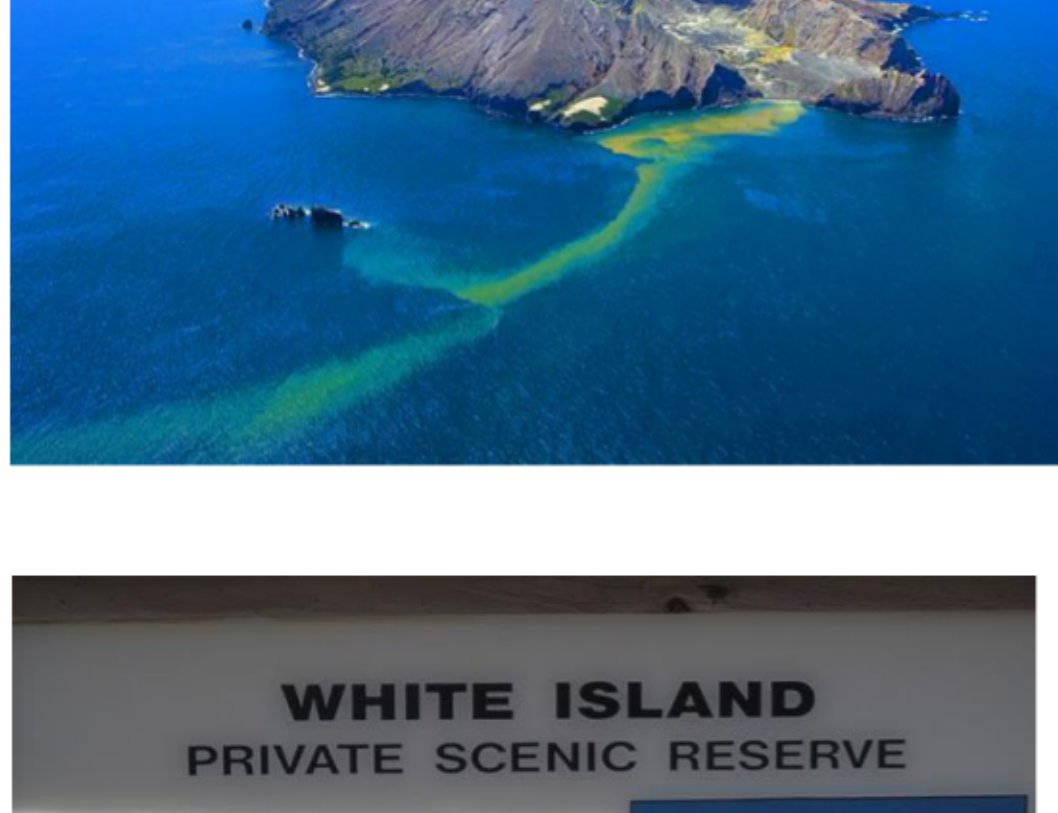
Concerning the race, I missed the start and so I moved into my late-start mode, which is to concentrate on improving my position in the fleet and match-racing against any PRU vessels that I see - "lyric" and "Rainbow Chaser" in this case. My strategy is very much "seat of the pants" - I'll look at the weather six and twelve hours ahead and try to optimize my course, based on that.

For this race, the weather was pretty straight-forward and really, the only difficult parts were navigating through the islands in the Hauraki Gulf, to and from the mark at Channel Island. I started in 135th place and finished in 97th, which I was quite pleased about, but to be honest, quite a lot of my improvement was due to passing vessels littering the beaches and rocks!

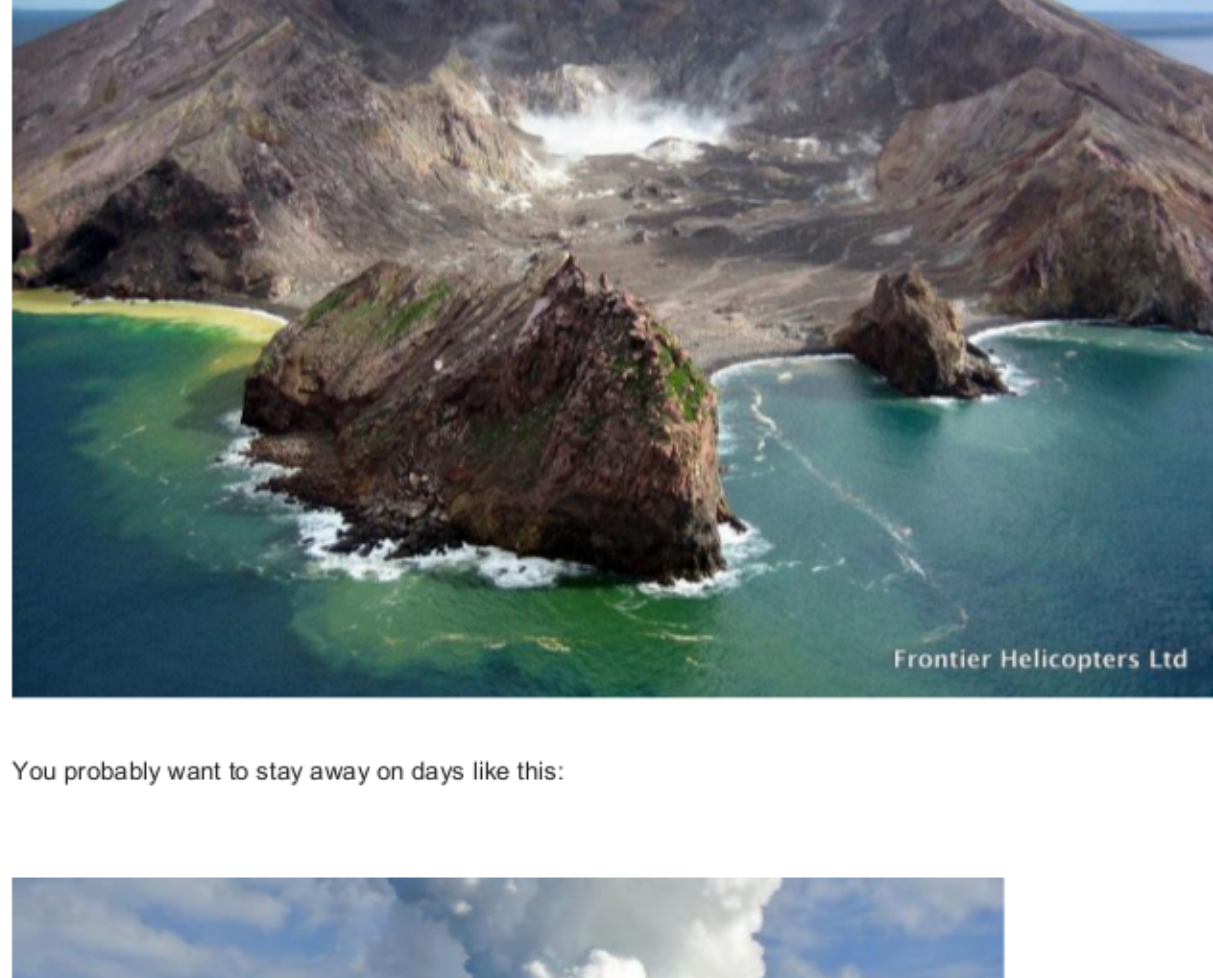
On the run-in for Channel Island, I neglected to zoom-in to check my track for SLIs and I ran aground - ironically on Maria Island, which is my wife's name!

Now for some local colour.

White Island is NZ's most active volcano. Not wishing to spend several hours in a high-speed catamaran, possibly throwing up, I invested in seats for my wife and I, in a Robinson R44 for a tour of the island.



The island is a breached caldera, with a crater lake in the centre. The helicopter landed on the flattish area near the beach and then the pilot acted as a tour guide, warning us not to stray from the paths.



You probably want to stay away on days like this:



As a geologist, I found it fascinating. As a safety precaution, they gave us hard hats and respirators and the advice, in case of an eruption, was to move up hill, quickly! The biggest risk in my opinion was ditching in the R44.



The fumaroles (steam vents) are amazingly noisy and sound like some subterranean industrial plant/steam locomotive



Lots of sulphur deposits in the streams flowing out of the crater lake



The crater lake, viewed at a safe distance from the edge. The temperature is about 95° C and the pH is similar to battery acid - best not to fall in!



Sulphur mining facilities - abandoned in the 1930s as uneconomic. In 1914, an eruption killed all ten workers on the island; the only survivor being the camp cat.



A "volcanic bomb" with our pilot for scale. All the best geological photos must have a scale in them!



The interesting thing about this car-sized rock is that it has "flow-folds" in it, indicating that it was still plastic in the air and deformed on hitting the ground.



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whakaari/White_Island

Miss_Saigon / December 2016